COLOURS OF JOY
People celebrate Holi in Bengaluru's Sheshadripuram on Tuesday
—MOHAMMED ASAD

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Iran goes after US embassies in West Asia, shuts Hormuz

Drones strike US embassy in Riyadh, Kuwait

DUBAI, 3 MARCH

Iran struck the US Embassy in Riyadh with two drones early on Tuesday, causing fire and damage, as the conflict with the United States and Israel widened dramatically. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry confirmed the attack, while the embassy urged Americans to avoid the compound. No casualties were reported.

The strike followed an attack on the US Embassy in Kuwait, which has since closed. The US State Department ordered the evacuation of non-emergency personnel and families from Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates due to "serious safety risks".

Across Tehran, explosions were heard overnight as US and Israeli forces intensified airstrikes. US President Donald Trump said that it was "too late" for Iran to restart negotiations. Trump said that Iran's leadership, along with its air defence, Air Force, and Navy are "gone".

Iran claimed to have closed the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil route through which a fifth of global oil trade passes, warning vessels not to transit. Energy facilities in Qatar and Saudi Arabia were hit, and several ships attacked, sending global oil and gas prices soaring. The Iranian Red Crescent said at least 787 people have been killed in Iran. Eleven were killed in Israel, while deaths were also reported in the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. The US confirmed six American soldiers were killed in Kuwait. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps claimed it struck a US air base in Bahrain. Meanwhile, Israeli forces said they targeted Iran's leadership compound in Tehran, including the Presidential Office and Supreme National Security Council facilities.

Strikes caused two explosions at a broadcasting facility in Tehran, Iranian state TV said, adding that no one was injured.

A 4.3 magnitude earthquake struck southern Iran's Gerash region on Tuesday, though no significant damage was reported.

Cost of 'Operation Epic Fury' in 72 hours:
$1.43 B+
Targets hit in Iran:
1,250+

An Iranian flag is placed atop ruins in Tehran amid US-Israeli military strikes in Tehran—*PTI*

'ISRAEL HACKED IRAN TRAFFIC CAMERAS'

A report by the Financial Times said Israeli intelligence spent years hacking Tehran's traffic cameras and mobile networks to monitor Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's movements, enabling a targeted strike that killed him. Netanyahu defended the campaign, calling Iran a threat to the US. Vice President JD Vance said Washington was determined to ensure Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon. *—PTI*

India flags risks to trade, energy; JSW facility hit in UAE

India impacted as Qatar halts LNG production

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

JSW Infrastructure Ltd has become the first Indian company directly affected by the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict, after a fire broke out at its oil storage terminal in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Local media reported that an Iranian drone was intercepted over the Fujairah Oil Industry Zone on Tuesday. Debris from the drone triggered the fire at the JSW facility, which has since been brought under control. JSW Infrastructure, had acquired the Fujairah liquid storage terminal in November 2023. The facility has 15 storage tanks with a total capacity of 4,65,000 cubic metres, roughly 3 million barrels of oil, equivalent to a day's crude production in the UAE.

Soon after the incident, India voiced concern over potential disruptions to its economy due to energy supply risks. In its second statement since US-Israel strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation, New Delhi called for "dialogue and diplomacy" to restore regional peace, noting that the developments "evoke great anxiety" given India's critical stakes in West Asia's security and stability. India highlighted the interests of nearly one crore Indian nationals in the region.

Iran has blocked the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, through which around 50 per cent of India's crude oil imports, roughly 2.6 million barrels a day, pass, triggering a surge in global oil prices.

Meanwhile, Qatar, India's largest LNG supplier, has declared force majeure following production halts after Iranian attacks, cutting gas supplies to Indian industry by up to 40 per cent. Qatar provides around 40 per cent of India's nearly 27 million tonnes of annual LNG imports. Gas marketers, including Petronet LNG Ltd, GAIL and Indian Oil Corporation, have reduced industrial supplies while maintaining retail CNG distribution.

Spot LNG prices have surged to USD 25 per million British thermal unit, nearly double term contract rates, prompting importers to explore alternative sources.

JSW Infrastructure, had acquired UAE's Fujairah liquid storage terminal in November 2023 —*PTI*

IRAN DENIES ATTACK ON OMAN

Iran denied reports that it carried out a military attack on Oman, describing the Gulf state as a "friend and neighbor." The denial came after the Oman News Agency reported Tuesday that two drones were intercepted in the Dhofar Governorate in southern Oman, while a third crashed near Salalah Port. *—PTI*

>More on Pgs 2, 3, 5 , 6, 7, 8

PM speaks to King of Oman & Crown Prince of Kuwait

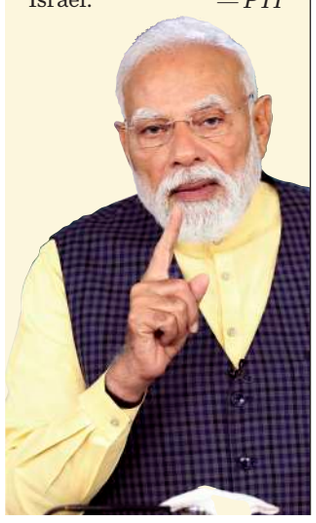
NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Sultan Haitham bin Tarik of Oman, Crown Prince of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Tuesday, and expressed concern over attacks on their countries during the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

He condemned violations of their sovereignty and territorial integrity and discussed the welfare and security of the Indian community in the region.

Over the past two days, Modi also spoke with the King of Bahrain, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah II of Jordan, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, reaffirming India's solidarity with affected nations.

He highlighted the importance of dialogue and diplomacy to restore regional peace. With nearly 90 lakh Indians in the Gulf and West Asia, flight disruptions due to military escalation have left hundreds stranded in hub airports including Dubai and Doha. About 10,000 Indians reside in Iran, and over 40,000 in Israel. *— PTI*



787 people in Iran killed by US-Israeli airstrikes.

250 flights cancelled across Indian airports.

- IAEA confirms damage at Iran's Natanz nuclear site.
- Israel bombs Iran's Presidential Office and Supreme National Security council
- First lady Melania Trump chairs UN meeting on children days after strike on Iranian school killed 180.

Remain indoors: Indian embassy tells Indians in Iran

India urged its nationals in Iran to exercise utmost caution, remain indoors, and avoid unnecessary movement as the security situation in the Persian Gulf deteriorates following fresh US and Israeli military strikes. The embassy advised citizens to stay updated with news.

3 Indian sailors killed near Oman

JERUSALEM, 3 MARCH

Three Indian seafarers serving on foreign-flagged vessels have been killed and one injured in four separate incidents in the Middle East, the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) said on Tuesday, amid escalating US-Israel-Iran military tensions.

The DGS said it is closely monitoring maritime security in the Persian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman, where missile and drone activity, electronic interference and other threats pose risks to trade routes.

Maritime operators have been advised to conduct voyage-specific risk assessments, maintain heightened vigilance, enhanced bridge watch and continuous communication readiness, and report suspicious activity immediately. Transit through high-risk zones must be reviewed.

The remaining crew members are safe, and authorities are coordinating support for affected families.

The DGS has activated 24x7 monitoring, real-time tracking of Indian-flagged vessels, mandatory reporting protocols, and coordination with the Indian Navy, Ministry of External Affairs and other agencies. A dedicated quick response team has also been formed. *—PTI*

ISRAEL HAS INDIA: VIDEO GOES VIRAL

A panel discussion at an Israeli news channel became a talking point online when the anchor said Israel has India's "1.4 billion people to manufacture weapons". This was in response to Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) Colonel Gabi Siboni, who said Israel will sell defence systems worldwide. To this, i24 anchor Sharon Magal said that Israel had no domestic production line for weapons, but it has India.

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India accounted for 34 per cent of Israel's total arms exports between 2020 and 2024.

US unable to evacuate citizens from Israel

JERUSALEM, 3 MARCH

The US Embassy in Jerusalem has warned American citizens in Israel that it is currently unable to organise evacuations, urging them to take personal responsibility for their safety and travel arrangements as regional tensions escalate.

In an advisory issued on Tuesday, the embassy said the security situation remains unpredictable and can deteriorate without notice. It stressed the importance of heightened vigilance, including knowledge of the nearest shelters in case of sirens or red alerts. "The US Embassy is not in a position at this time to evacuate or directly assist Americans in departing Israel," the statement said, noting that the Israeli Ministry of Tourism has begun operating shuttles to the Taba Border Crossing with Egypt from 2 March.

The advisory follows an attack on the US Embassy in Saudi Arabia by two Iranian drones, with no casualties reported. In response to growing safety risks, the US has issued "leave now" orders for nearly a dozen embassies across the Middle East until further notice. *—Agencies*

US tells citizens to leave these 12 nations:
Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

RCB to play 5 IPL home matches in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will play five of their home matches at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here and the remaining two fixtures at Raipur's Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL), the franchise said on Tuesday.

The announcement ended doubts about whether the IPL 2025 winners would be able to play at their home ground, the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, following the stampede that killed 11 fans after RCB's maiden title win.

Since that tragic incident, the venue has not hosted any major domestic matches including the Ranji Trophy, Vijay Hazare Trophy, or even the Maharaja Trophy KSCA T20.

"This significant development comes after months of hard work and close coordination across all concerned authorities with a common goal of bringing the games back to home ground for the fans," RCB said in a release.

The franchise said that the two "home matches" in Raipur will be "as per prior commitment." RCB CEO Rajesh Menon said the fans deserve to watch their team compete at home. *—PTI*

3 FAMILY MEMBERS ESCAPE

Woman dies in B'luru house fire

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

A 55-year-old woman died in a fire that broke out at her residence in Rajajinagar on Monday night, while three other family members escaped safely, police said on Tuesday.

The deceased is Savitha. Her husband Ramesh Babu, a contractor, their son Vishruth, and Babu's mother Channamma were not injured.

According to the complaint filed by Babu, the ground and first floors of the building had been rented out, while the family lived in a duplex portion on the third floor. At the time of the incident, Babu and his mother were watching television on the lower level of the duplex, while Savitha and Vishruth were on the upper level.

The fire reportedly started in one of the two rooms upstairs —*x*

Vishruth noticed a fire in one of the two rooms upstairs and alerted his father and grandmother, sending them outside. However, before Savitha could come downstairs, the blaze intensified rapidly, trapping her on the upper floor. Vishruth managed to escape. Fire and emergency personnel extinguished the blaze. Savitha was taken to Manipal Hospital in Malleswaram, where she was declared brought dead. A case has been registered. *—PTI*

FIRST TIME FASTING

Name :
Abdul Rahman Md Nawaz.
Age : 7 1/2 years.

Father's name:
Mohammed Nawaz Abdul Mutalib

Grandfather's (Daada):
Abdul **Mutalib NSK**

Grandfather (Naana):
Liyakhat Ali Khan

*ADVERTORIAL

Relief as Middle East flight lands at KIA

When 'safest city' Abu Dhabi came under attack, panic gripped Indians who heard drones strike Gulf

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Relief was writ large on the faces of Indian passengers who arrived at the Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in Bengaluru from the UAE, ending a period of high tension fuelled by the conflict in West Asia.

Upon arrival on Monday night, the passengers recollected the tense moments of a missile attack in the Gulf nation, before flying towards safety.

Travellers thanked Etihad Airways, the Abu Dhabi government and the Indian government for ensuring their safety and providing accommodation and transport during the disruption.

Saurabh Shetty, who hails from Mangaluru and works for an oil company in Abu Dhabi, described the situation as "worrisome and scary".

"When I came to catch my flight on 28 February, everything seemed alright. Suddenly, near the check-in area, we got an alarm and were asked to sit down. We were cautioned not to sit near the windows because of a missile threat," he said.

"Someone said, 'Missile is going to hit.' We were shocked. We were like we are in the safest city — Abu Dhabi. How can this happen here? Later, when we looked outside, we saw a missile. We never thought such things could happen here. Everyone was calling to check if we were safe. Thankfully, we were safe inside the airport," Shetty added. "If one missile had hit, we would not be here."

"From my (hotel) room, I could see interceptions happening in the sky. At that time, I thought about how the Indian Army faces such situations," he added.

Mahesh, who was travelling from Boston, lauded the airline's arrangements.

"Around 15 to 16 flights operated today, and they are expecting more to resume. Only partial airspace is available right now," he said.

Ramya, a Bengaluru resident who had travelled to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, said, "Our return flight was cancelled initially. Today (2 March), Etihad arranged another flight for us."

Niruban from Coimbatore said there was some delay due to drone activity, but the journey back was smooth. "The Abu Dhabi government took very good care of us. Within four to five hours, they arranged transport to good hotels and ensured everyone's safety. Even while returning to the airport."

Prasad, a software developer working in Bengaluru, said while Abu Dhabi was relatively stable, the atmosphere remained tense.

"We heard sounds and felt vibrations. There were interceptions happening, and some debris reportedly fell near the airport. Dubai was said to be worse," he said.

Girimalappa Kerur, originally from Bilgi in Bagalkot district and currently based in Bengaluru, said. "We could hear explosions." —*PTI*

Eighteen of the 283 people stranded in West Asia have returned home, officials said —*ANI*

No info, no flights, no updates: Foreigners at KIA

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

For several foreign nationals stranded at the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru, the uncertainty about the future sullied an otherwise nice holiday. Many said that they had been waiting at the airport, but had no information about when they could catch their flights.

"It's been a nice holiday until now," a German national said. Her flight from Bengaluru to Dubai and then to Dusseldorf, Germany, was cancelled because of the ongoing conflict. "We've been waiting since yesterday to get a flight or any information from Emirates, but there's not much."

She had been in India for three weeks visiting places like Bangalore, Mysore, Madikeri, National Park, Gokarna, Palolem, Panaji and Baga Beach. "We have no information, no flight, and no updates.

We saw only one flight yesterday, directly from here to Frankfurt, but it was for 8,000 euros, which is too expensive to pay. We're waiting here on the hotline; it's the only thing we can do."

- Foreign nationals said that the flight cancellations had sullied an otherwise lovely visit to India. They recount that air companies are unable to provide accurate information about when they might be able to leave, or even provide refunds

A Swiss national, Sirius, said he is stuck at Bangalore airport while traveling to Geneva via Abu Dhabi after his flight got cancelled. He added that he is waiting for his travel agency to find solutions or provide a refund

"They (flight administration) just said it was supposed to be rescheduled at first, but then it was purely cancelled. They were apologizing but not giving me any real solutions," Sirius said. —*ANI*

Ashoka flays CM's comments on Khamenei's death

BENGALURU, 3 JAN

Karnataka expects maturity from its Chief Minister, not impulsive commentary on sensitive global affairs, BJP leader R Ashoka said.

Siddaramaiah had on Monday "strongly condemned" the contradiction between the US speaking of peace while choosing the "path of war" and expressed condolences on the assassination of Iran supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Ashoka retorted on X on Tuesday, saying that New Delhi's foreign policy is driven by strategic depth and not by "domestic vote-bank compulsions or electoral calculations."

The LoP drew parallels to Siddaramaiah's previous comments, especially during Operation Sindoor, saying that the CM was prone to "knee-jerk reactions". —*PTI*

Siddaramaiah backs Stalin on discussing federalism

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has backed Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin in calling for a renewed national discourse on Centre–State relations, asserting that "federalism is not a political demand — it is part of the basic structure of our Constitution."

Responding to Stalin's letter on a report concerning Union-State relations, Siddaramaiah said "increasing centralisation in fiscal and legislative matters has disturbed the delicate balance envisioned by our Constitution makers." He cautioned that what was meant to be cooperative federalism has, in practice, begun to resemble "coercive federalism."

Emphasising fiscal federalism, he noted that constitutional provisions relating to revenue sharing and institutions like the Finance Commission and GST Council must not dilute the fiscal sovereignty of states. "These are not sectional claims; they are constitutional claims," he wrote.

Siddaramaiah urged the Union government to provide an institutional platform, such as a revitalised Inter-State Council, to enable transparent and structured dialogue among states to strengthen India's democratic and federal framework. —*PTI*

INAUGURATED IN JANUARY

School roof caves in as girl escapes death; official suspended

KALABURAGI, 3 MARCH

A portion of the roof of the Prabuddha Academy building in Kalaburagi, which was recently inaugurated by Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge, collapsed on Monday. A girl student narrowly escaped injury in the incident.

The academy had been inaugurated in January by Priyank, who formally launched the competitive examination coaching centre.

The Rs 29.52 crore centre's refreshment room's roof caved in, just a month after inauguration has triggered outrage.

Responding to the incident, Preeti Doddamani, Joint Director of the Social Welfare Department and also the in-charge of the training centre, stated, "Since the refreshment centre was not in use at the time, no one was injured."

Prabuddha Academy in Kalaburagi —*SALAR*

Social activist MS Patil Nariboli urged the district in-charge Minister and the Deputy Commissioner to take appropriate action.

AEE Saurabh Bhiman, who was serving as the in-charge Executive Engineer of Karnataka Rural Infrastructure Development Limited, was suspended on Monday night.

The academy was promoted as a modern learning centre with digital resources, mentoring rooms and advanced study infrastructure. It was presented as a major support system for talented students from economically weaker backgrounds seeking competitive exam preparation and aimed to provide free UPSC and KPSC coaching for 500 students from Kalyan Karnataka. —*Salar News*

Not tapping DKS' phone: CM lashes out at Oppn

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah rubbished the Opposition's allegations that he was phone-tapping members of Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's camp.

The Opposition BJP and JD(S) had claimed that Siddaramaiah was spying on Shivakumar's camp amid the alleged power tussle within the ruling Congress.

"This is a desperate statement of dissatisfied souls," Siddaramaiah said in a statement on X on Tuesday. "These unemployed Opposition leaders have been trying to create mistrust between Shivakumar and me. Let both of them know that this may ease the sourness that has filled them, but it will not affect our relationship, which is like milk and honey."

Noting that one of the people making the allegation was former CM HD Kumaraswamy and the other was former deputy chief minister and home minister R Ashoka, Siddaramaiah quipped: "It seems that (they) are making these allegations based on the strength of their experience".

> **If the BJP and JD(S) leaders have any evil idea to spread false news, spoil our relationship and woo Shivakumar, I wish them all the best... I wish that Kumaraswamy and Ashoka, instead of wasting their precious moments in such crooked politics, would work as a constructive opposition party and do good... The Congress Chief Minister will remain in the State**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

He noted the political scandal in 2018 when current State BJP President BY Vijayendra alleged that Kumaraswamy was tapping the phone of swamies, which was confirmed after a CBI probe, adding that there was mutual distrust between the BJP and JD(S). —*PTI*

HDK wanted Prajwal's life sentence: Cong MLA

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Congress MLA from Maddur, KM Uday, has held Union Minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy responsible for the life imprisonment sentence awarded to expelled party leader and former MP Prajwal Revanna.

Prajwal Revanna, son of JD(S) MLA HD Revanna, was jailed in connection with rape charges. Uday alleged that the case stemmed from internal family rivalry and political conspiracy within the JD(S). Claiming a political vendetta, Uday said the former MP was targeted after Kumaraswamy's son, Nikhil Kumaraswamy, lost the elections.

"Will Kumaraswamy, who cannot tolerate his own brother's son, tolerate leaders like us? It is only his family that should grow -- no one else," the Congress MLA said.

He further accused Kumaraswamy of being responsible for the circulation of controversial videos linked to the case.

Prajwal, grandson of former PM HD Devegowda, was convicted by the Special Court for People's Representatives in August 2025 for raping a house-help at a farmhouse in Holenarasipura, Hassan district. —*ANI*

BLOOD MOON

A blood moon captured from Rajajinagar, in Bengaluru on Tuesday evening, shortly after a total lunar eclipse occured. This was the last total lunar eclipse until 2029 —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Rs 11.50 cr drugs seized in City, two peddlers arrested

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Police have arrested two alleged interstate drug peddlers, including a woman, with narcotics valued at Rs 11.50 crore, during a series of operations by the Narcotics Control Wing of the Central Crime Branch (CCB).

The raid at Bagalur police station limits in the City resulted in the seizure of 8,335 LSD strips, 5kg of Hydro Ganja, 534gm of Charas, two mobile phones, and a two-wheeler. A senior officer stated, "This is the first time such a large quantity of LSD has been recovered in the City. We are trying to establish its source and intended recipients."

Additionally, 1.5kg of Hydro Ganja was seized from K G Nagar, concealed inside chocolate and biscuit boxes to evade detection, with an estimated value of Rs 1.5 crore. Efforts are ongoing to trace the accused. Another arrest involved a man selling narcotics, with 27.239kg Ganja and 3.2kg Hashish Oil seized, worth Rs 55 lakh. Two foreign women overstaying their visas were also detained and handed over to authorities. The operations were led by senior officers under the guidance of Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Seemanth Kumar Singh. —*Agencies*

I don't need revolution, I have patience: DKS

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said he is with "utmost patience", and he has no need to indulge in any kind of revolution, as he believes in himself and has hope amid the alleged power tussle.

Asserting that he is not interested in blackmail, Shivakumar, said, though a "street fighter", his fight is never within the party.

"I have never spoken about the (CM) post becoming vacant," Shivakumar said. "Being the (State) President of the party no one should point out to me that I have done injustice from this position, killing the party.... So, I'm with utmost patience, I know what is all happening, whether it is right or wrong." —*PTI*

HUMAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT

Bear kills man; villagers beat it to death

VIJAYANAGARA, 3 MARCH

A shepherd was killed by a bear in the Kudligi taluk of Vijayanagara district. After the incident enraged villagers beat the bear to death.

The deceased shepherd is Obanna, 30, a resident of Halasagara village in Kudligi taluk.

As usual, on Saturday, Obanna had taken his sheep for grazing in the reserved forest area near Halasagara. However, when he did not return home by evening, his family and villagers began searching for him in the forest.

During the search, Obanna was found lying in a pool of blood deep inside the forest. The bear had mauled his face and other parts of his body, resulting in his death. The sight left his family devastated.

The incident occured when a shepherd went to graze his sheep —*FREEPIK*

As news of his death spread, the entire village rushed towards the forest.

Enraged, villagers searched for the bear.

When they found it, hundreds of villagers attacked it with stones and sticks and killed it.

Typically, in cases of wild animal attacks, a complaint is lodged with the Forest Department.

However, in this case villagers took the law into their own hands.

Officials from the Gudekote Police Station visited the scene. Obanna's body has been sent for autopsy.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department has been informed about the dead bear.

Since a wild animal was killed, a case may be registered against the villagers under the Wildlife Protection Act.

Locals said attacks by animals have increased in the region and that the Forest Department has failed to provide protection. —*Salar News*

Dharwad road accident unveiled as contract killing

DHARWAD, 3 MARCH

A case initially registered as a fatal road accident in Dharwad has been revealed as a premeditated murder, with dashcam footage playing a crucial role. Lalita Hattaragi, 43, died on 26 February on Savadatti Road in Dharwad after being hit from behind by a vehicle. Police initially treated it as an accident, but her father's suspicion prompted a reinvestigation by Dharwad Rural Police.

A breakthrough came from dashcam footage recorded by a bus following the vehicle, which showed a black Mahindra Thar deliberately ramming Lalita.

The vehicle's absence of a number plate further raised suspicion.

Police later discovered that Lalita's husband, Uday Hattaragi, allegedly planned her murder amid longstanding marital disputes.

The couple had been in conflict for over a decade, with Lalita seeking two acres of land as part of a settlement, which her husband refused.

Uday reportedly hired contract killers for Rs 40 lakh and lured Lalita to a location near Amminabhavi village under the pretext of settling their dispute.

As she walked along the roadside, she was struck and killed. Four accused, including Uday, have been arrested, and the vehicle has been seized.

One suspect remains at large.

The case has now been re-registered as murder under relevant provisions of law, and further investigation is underway. —*Salar News*

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Sonia flays PM's silence on Khamenei's death

Says silence on the killing of Iran's supreme leader not neutral, raises questions on foreign policy

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

In a scathing criticism of the Modi government, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday said its silence on the targeted assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not neutral but an abdication, and raises serious doubts about the direction and credibility of India's foreign policy.

In her article published in The Indian Express, Gandhi said there is an urgent need for "us to rediscover" the moral strength and articulate it with clarity and commitment.

"Barely 48 hours before the assassination, the Prime Minister returned from a visit to Israel, where he reiterated unequivocal support for the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, even as the Gaza conflict continues to draw global outrage over the scale of civilian casualties, many of them women and children," Gandhi said.

The former Congress president also demanded that when Parliament reconvenes for the second part of the Budget session, the government's "disturbing silence" over the breakdown of international order must be debated openly and without evasion. 'Initially, ignoring the massive US-Israeli onslaught, the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) confined himself to condemning Iran's retaliatory strike on the UAE without addressing the sequence of events that preceded it. Later, he uttered platitudes about his 'deep concern' and talked of 'dialogue and diplomacy' -- which is precisely what was underway before the massive unprovoked attacks launched by Israel and the US," Gandhi said. "When the targeted killing of a foreign leader draws no clear defence of sovereignty or international law from our country and impartiality is abandoned, it raises serious doubts about the direction and credibility of our foreign policy," Gandhi said in her article.

This silence is not neutral, she asserted. Gandhi pointed out that the assassination was carried out without a formal declaration of war and during an ongoing diplomatic process. Gandhi pointed out that the Congress has unequivocally condemned the bombings and targeted assassinations on Iranian soil. —*PTI*

Forner Congress president Sonia Gandhi (L) Slain Iranian Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R) —*PTI*

> **Silence now diminishes India's standing in the world... India must be morally clear. We should have the courage to speak plainly in defence of international law and human lives**
>
> -Rahul Gandhi,
> Congress leader, on Khamenei's killing

CBSE defers board exams in W Asia

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Tuesday postponed the Class 10 and 12 board exams scheduled for March 5 and 6 in West Asia region amid the Iran-Israel conflict, officials said. "Due to the current situation in parts of West Asia — Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE, the board has decided to postpone class 10, 12 exams on 5 March (Thursday) and 6 March (Friday)," said CBSE Examination Controller Sanyam Bhardwaj. The new dates will be announced later. —*PTI*

Security personnel stand guard as strict restrictions remained imposed in Kashmir following massive protests in Sopore, Jammu and across the valley against the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei —*PTI*

Kashmir remains under curbs over Khamenei's killing

SRINAGAR/RAJOURI/ JAMMU, 3 MARCH

Strict restrictions remained imposed in Kashmir for the second consecutive day on Tuesday following massive protests across the valley against the killing of Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

While educational institutions were shut for two days and mobile internet speed throttled on Monday as precautionary measures, the authorities cancelled all movement of security force convoys in the valley on Tuesday as protests started turning violent at some places.

In order to avoid tensions, they have also decided not to have any road opening parties of the security forces deployed on Tuesday.

At least 14 people, including six security personnel, were injured during protests on Monday.

Officials said that 75 rallies were held at various places in the Kashmir Valley, while a few demonstrations were held in the Jammu region as well on Monday.

This is the first time since August 2019 that protests on such a large scale have taken place in Kashmir.

Additionally, a case was registered against some media outlets and individuals here on Tuesday for allegedly circulating misleading information with an intention to incite unrest in connection with the protests against Khamenei's killing.

Protests erupted in various parts of Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district on Tuesday against Khamenei's killing.

In Budhal, residents gathered in front of the Sheikhul-Alam Masjid to stage a demonstration and condemned the joint military action by the US and Israel in Iran.

Lt Governor Manoj Sinha reviewed the security situation in J&K in a meeting with top security officials here, officials said. —*PTI*

West Asia conflict: Left parties protest govt's silence

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Left parties on Tuesday held a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the US-Israel attack on Iran and the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, accusing the Union government of maintaining silence on the issue.

Scores of protesters gathered here, holding placards and raising slogans against the attack. They urged people to "stand against the attack" and express solidarity with the Iranian people.

"The silence of the government of India over (US President Donald) Trump's imperialist hooliganism, the attack on Iran... Why is Narendra Modi quiet?" CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat said.

Meanwhile, organisers said in a statement that the protest would bring together concerned citizens, activists and members of civil society to voice opposition to the military escalation and to demand respect for national sovereignty.

CPI(ML) said India do not want this war. —*PTI*

—*PTI*

Ex-Union minister KP Unnikrishnan is no more

KOZHIKODE, 3 MARCH

Former Union Minister KP Unnikrishnan, who was regarded as one of the prominent figures in Indian politics during the 1980s and 1990s, died in the early hours of Tuesday, his family said. He was 89. He died while undergoing treatment for age-related ailments at a private hospital here, they said. His cremation will be held at Manari crematorium here on Wednesday. Having been elected to the Lok Sabha six consecutive times from Vadakara, he served as a Union Minister in the VP Singh Cabinet, holding the portfolios of Surface Transport and Communications during 1989–90. He said that, beyond being a politician, Unnikrishnan was also a writer, orator and journalist.—*PTI*

—*PTI*

BJP nominates Nabin to RS from Bihar

PATNA, 3 MARCH

BJP President Nitin Nabin is all set to enter Parliament with the party on Tuesday naming him as one of its two candidates from Bihar for the biennial Rajya Sabha elections. Nabin, who currently holds the Bankipur assembly seat in the state, has been named along with Shivesh Kumar, a former MLA who had unsuccessfully contested the Sasaram Lok Sabha seat in the general elections held two years ago. Nabin, 45, was catapulted to the top party post in January, when he replaced two-term national president and Union minister Jagat Prakash Nadda. The name of Nabin as a possible candidate from Bihar had been doing the rounds ever since the Rajya Sabha elections were announced a few weeks ago.—*PTI*

Hundreds of air passengers from Maharashtra are stranded in Gulf amid Israel-Iran conflict —*ANI*

Gulf returnees recall fear, soaring costs

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

"I didn't feel any relief, not even during the flight, until I finally landed in Delhi," said Sunil Gupta, one of the several passengers who returned home shaken, as the ongoing conflict in West Asia involving the US, Israel and Iran has disrupted travel and daily life, leaving many Indians stranded.

Gupta, who was returning from Dubai, said the uncertainty was overwhelming.

Gupta said even on the flight, he could not relax and kept thinking about the situation until he landed in Delhi.

Tensions have escalated following a coordinated offensive launched by the United States and Israel against Iran on February 28. The US and Israel jointly launched military strikes on the Islamic country on Saturday. Iran responded by firing drones and missiles at Israel and US military installations across the Gulf, and also at the global business hub of Dubai.

Arvind, a resident of Noida who also returned from Dubai, said many people were stranded after flights got cancelled.

He said the flight that he had initially booked was cancelled, forcing him to stay back for four extra days.

For some families, the distress has been far more personal.

Kunwar Shakeel Ahmed, father of an Indian student studying in Iran, said the situation near his daughter's hostel is frightening.

Several returnees said in view of the crisis, special arrangements may be needed to bring back the stranded Indians as many of them are facing financial strain. —*PTI*

Chidambaram meets TN CM Stalin amid DMK-Cong seat-sharing talks

CHENNAI, 3 MARCH

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram, accompanied by TNCC chief K Selvaperunthagai, called on Chief Minister MK Stalin at his camp office amid an impasse over seat-sharing negotiations. Earlier, Selvaperunthagai met Chidambaram, and both visited the CM's residence. Further details are awaited. The Congress seat-sharing committee, led by Tamil Nadu in-charge Girish Chodankar, had held initial talks and submitted a "wish list" to the DMK committee headed by TR Baalu last week.

Meanwhile, AIADMK leader Edappadi K Palaniswami announced that his party would soon begin seat-sharing talks with allies. He maintained there was no confusion within the party-led NDA, contrary to media reports, and said confusion was only in the DMK alliance, especially regarding whether Congress would continue. Palaniswami stated, "We have formed a resurgent alliance in Tamil Nadu, and the AIADMK-led NDA will ensure victory in the upcoming Assembly election and the AIADMK will form the government."

He had met Union Minister Amit Shah on 2 March. to discuss the political situation. Asked about new parties joining the NDA, Palaniswami replied, "There's a likelihood of some parties joining soon. We are in talks now." —*PTI*

FINANCIAL BONANZA

DMK gives Rs 2,000 to over 37L beneficiaries ahead of polls

CHENNAI, 3 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has announced that his government has credited a Rs 2,000 fund to the bank accounts of 37.79 lakh people from marginalised sections of society. Responding to appeals for additional support for the elderly, widows, aged transgenders, and persons with disabilities, he said the government has provided Rs 2,000 more on top of their existing monthly pensions. Stalin stated, "The move is aimed at alleviating the financial hardships of those living on the margins."

This funding follows the distribution of a Rs 2,000 summer package for women in February under the 'Kalaignar Magalir Urimai Thogai' scheme, which prompted many vulnerable groups to seek similar aid. The government transferred Rs 3,200 to 29.29 lakh beneficiaries, including senior citizens and widows already under social security schemes.

Additionally, Rs 3,500 was credited to 5.92 lakh people with disabilities, and Rs 4,000 was transferred to 2.58 lakh families receiving maintenance assistance. On 13 February, Stalin announced Rs 5,000 for 1.31 crore women-headed family ration cardholders under the DMK government's monthly assistance scheme.

The government is also supporting 1.62 lakh fishing households with Rs 8,000 each during the annual fishing ban from April to June. Furthermore, Rs 8.53 crore was released to aid 14,870 tea farmers in Nilgiris, based on a Rs 2 per kilo purchase price through 15 cooperative factories. Stalin added,

"We will not leave one person behind in the progress of the State. We will win together." —*PTI*

> • Rs 2,000 is on top of the existing monthly pensions.The move is aimed at alleviating the financial hardships of those living on the margins. This funding follows the distribution of a Rs 2,000 summer package for women.

BJP alleges Gandhi family tried to 'extort' Rs 7 crore

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The BJP cited the claim of a former Haryana Congress leader's husband to allege that the Gandhi family tried to "extort" Rs 7 crore from the couple for an assembly ticket.

BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari claimed that Gaurav Kumar, the husband of a former Haryana Women's Congress general secretary, has made public WhatsApp chats involving the PAs of senior Congress leaders including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra.

He described the chats as "prima facie proof" of the Gandhi family's "corruption."

Bhandari, however, did not disclose the name of the former Haryana Women Congress leader.

There was no reaction from the Congress.

Speaking here on Tuesday, Bhandari claimed that Kumar has exposed how the Gandhi family tried to extort Rs 7 crore from the couple for giving his wife a party ticket from the Bawal Assembly seat.

"At a press conference, he (Gaurav Kumar) made public WhatsApp chats with the PAs of Priyanka Vadra, KC Venugopal and K Suresh, exposing how the Gandhi family used Venugopal to extort money from the former Haryana Women Congress leader." —*PTI*

AIR-POWER

Defence Ministry seals deal for 6 helicopters from HAL

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Defence Ministry on Tuesday sealed contracts worth Rs 5,083 crore for the procurement of six Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and surface-to-air missiles.

While the ALH Mk-II helicopters are being procured for the Indian Coast Guard, the Shtil missiles will be deployed onboard the Indian Navy's warships.

"The contract for ALH Mk-III (maritime role) along with operational role equipment, an engineering support package, and performance-based logistics support, valued at Rs 2,901 crore, has been inked with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd," the ministry said.

It said these twin-engine helicopters incorporate state-of-the-art features superior to the currently operated airborne platforms and are capable of undertaking a wide spectrum of maritime security missions from shore-based airfields as well as from ships at sea.

"The induction will significantly enhance the Indian Coast Guard's capability for fulfilling the duties of safety and protection of artificial islands, offshore installations and protection of fishermen and marine environment," the ministry said.

The contract for the procurement of surface-to-air vertical launch - Shtil missiles and associated missile holding frames, valued at Rs 2,182 crore, has been signed with Russia's JSC Rosoboronexport.

The acquisition is intended to substantially enhance the air defence capabilities of the country's frontline warships against a wide spectrum of aerial threats, the ministry said. —*PTI*

Cong releases first list of 42 candidates for Assam polls

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Congress on Tuesday released its first list of 42 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly polls, fielding state party chief Gaurav Gogoi from the Jorhat seat.

Taking a lead in announcing the names of its candidates even before the declaration of the polls, the opposition party said Congress Legislature Party leader in Assam Debabrata Saikia will contest the election from the Nazira consituency.

Former Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Ripun Bora has been fielded from the Barchalla constituency.

According to the list of candidates released by All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary, organisation, K C Venugopal, Abdus Sobahan Ali Sarkar has been fielded from Gauripur, Markline Marak from Goalpara West (reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates), Girish Baruah from Bongaigaon and Mahananda Sarkar from Barpeta (reserved for Scheduled Cast candidates).

Ramen Singh Rabha will be the party candidate from the Boko-Chaygaon (ST) seat, Nandita Das from Hajo-Sualkuchi (SC) and Satyabrat Kalita from Kamalpur.

Mira Borthakur Goswami is being fielded from Dispur, while Diganta Barman will be the party candidate from Barkhetri and Ashok Kumar Sarma from Nalbari. The polls for the 126-member Assembly are likely to be held in April. -PTI

250 British era silver coins found in Beed

BEED, 3 MARCH

Around 250 silver coins from the British era, dating back to 1941, were recovered at a house construction site in Maharashtra's Beed district after children playing nearby uncovered an earthen pot. The children mistook the Re 1 coins for tokens and broke the pot, prompting the landowner to alert authorities. Ashti tehsildar Vaishali Patil confirmed, "We have seized a total of 250 silver coins dating back to 1941." The coins, made of pure silver and weighing between 4 and 5 kg, were found in Sangvi (Patan) village in Ashti tehsil on Saturday. —*PTI*

Defence bizman threatened, case goes to special cell

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Delhi Police have referred a complaint by defence entrepreneur Sahil Luthra to the Special Cell after he received death threats from an international extortion network. Luthra, MD of Vijayen Trishul Defence Solutions, said he received two calls on 26 February from numbers with Portugal and Germany codes. The callers claimed responsibility for a firing incident outside his Amritsar residence in November 2025 and warned of attacks. Threats were routed via VoIP calls from Portugal, Germany, Canada and the United States. Investigations are examining links to Babbar Khalsa and gangster Goldy Brar. —*PTI*

— PTI

Modi's YouTube channel crosses 30M subscribers

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's YouTube channel has crossed 30 million subscribers, making him the most-followed world leader. His subscriber count is four times higher than Jair Bolsonaro's and seven times that of Donald Trump. Modi has about three times more subscribers than Rahul Gandhi and four times more than the AAP and INC. Last month, he crossed 100 million followers on Instagram, becoming the first politician to do so. Officials highlighted his extensive digital outreach with his social media presence evolving into one of the most engaging globally, cementing his position as a leading influencer. —*PTI*

Delhi tribunal awards Rs 69 lakh to soldier's family

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

A Delhi Motor Accident Claims Tribunal awarded Rs 69.61 lakh to the family of army soldier Bal Kishan, who died in a 2021 accident. The order, issued on 20 February, found the accident was caused by rash driving by a trucker. Bloodstains on the truck's left front tyre, confirmed by a mechanical inspection report, were cited as evidence. The driver and owner failed to explain the bloodstains or the circumstances of the accident leading to adverse inferences. The tribunal, noting the vehicle was insured, directed ICICI Lombard to pay the compensation. All five claimants were dependent on the deceased. —*PTI*

'Let HC pick 5 to pray on Tirupparankundram hill'

Min Regupathy gave incident 'mischievous spin,' says judge

MADURAI, 3 MARCH

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court suggested to the administration to permit five persons named by the court to offer symbolic prayers for 15 minutes near the stone pillar atop the Tirupparankundram hill.

Hearing a contempt petition filed for non-compliance of an earlier direction on lighting Karthigai Deepam atop the Deepathoon, the court said the symbolic prayers (not lighting the lamp) could be allowed if the government wanted to show respect to the court's earlier orders.

Justice GR Swaminathan said that state Minerals and Mines Minister S Regupathy had "given a mischievous political spin" to the Tirupparankundram issue when he stated that the government would not permit the lighting of the Karthigai Deepam at the Deepathoon (stone pillar). Madurai collector KJ Praveen Kumar had filed an additional affidavit stating that he promulgated prohibition orders on 1 December 2025, to prevent law and order problems and not to hinder temple authorities from enforcing the high court's orders to light the lamp at the stone pillar.

The court said symbolic prayers (not lighting the lamp) could be allowed if the government wanted to respect the court's earlier orders —*PTI*

Responding, Justice Swaminathan said on 2 March, "I suggest that the court's order can be respected by permitting a group of five named by this court to go to the lower peak of the hillock where the Deepathoon is so that symbolic prayers can be offered."

"This exercise can be confined to 15 minutes. This is only a suggestion and not a direction," he added.

The judge posted the next hearing in the case to 4 March.

The judge also closed a sub-application seeking to initiate contempt proceedings against Regupathy for his reported statements on the issue. — *PTI*

WAR AGAINST TERROR

4 with 'Pak links' held in M'rashtra

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) raided four locations in Mumbai suburbs over suspected links to a Pakistan-based terror outfit, an official said on Tuesday.

Acting on specific intelligence, the ATS raided three premises in the eastern suburb of Govandi and one in Kurla. Four suspects have been detained for questioning.

The suspects were in contact with a Pakistan-based terror organisation banned in India under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), he said.

The ATS has seized incriminating evidence from the suspects, who are being interrogated for their alleged connections with the banned organisation, the official said. — *PTI*

Plane-shaped balloon with Urdu text found in Rajouri district

JAMMU, 3 MARCH

The police recovered an aeroplane-shaped balloon marked 'PIA' in Rajouri district on Tuesday, officials said.

A red and white aeroplane-shaped balloon bearing the text 'PIA' in Urdu was found in Sarhoti village in Dharamsal.

Locals alerted authorities after spotting the object.

Cops from the police post Teryath reached the site, secured the balloon, and seized it.

Earlier, on 23 February, two balloons with a Pakistani Rs 5,000 currency note and a US Dollar attached were recovered from Gunara village in the Akhnoor sector near Jammu. — *PTI*

ATTUKAL PONGALA

Women pray during the 'Attukal Pongala' in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday. Pongala is an offering to the Attukal Temple deity—*PTI*

Nitish's son Nishant to enter politics

PATNA, 3 MARCH

The entry of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's son, Nishant Kumar, into politics has been finalised, and the decision will soon be announced formally by the JD(U), state minister Sharwan Kumar said on Tuesday.

The senior JD(U) leader said Nishant will be given a "bigger responsibility" in the party.

"Now, it's clear, and it has been finalised that Nishant Kumar will join politics. Party workers have been demanding Nishant's entry into politics for years," he said.

Asked if Nishant can be sent to the Rajya Sabha, Kumar said, "Anything can happen."

Kumar, who has been a minister in the state cabinet for more than a decade, is considered very close to the CM.

Social Welfare Minister Madan Sahni said JD(U) workers have been demanding Nishant's entry into politics.

JD(U) ally BJP also welcomed Nishant's entry into politics. "I welcome the new generation to politics. I thank the CM for leading the NDA in the recent elections. It is a matter of great happiness that Nishant will now enter politics," Industries Minister Dilip Jaiswal said.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar with his son Nishant Kumar at his official residence in Patna —*PTI*

"He is certainly an educated leader, holding a B.Tech degree. His entry should be warmly welcomed," said the former state BJP president.

Five Rajya Sabha seats from Bihar will go to the polls on March 16. The last date for filing nominations is 5 March.

As per the latest tally in the state legislature, all five Rajya Sabha seats would now go to the NDA. — *PTI*

Boy killed in accidental firing at birthday party

LUCKNOW, 3 MARCH

A 13-year-old boy was killed allegedly in firing during a birthday party in the Krishna Nagar area of Lucknow, police said on Tuesday.

The incident took place around 6.40 pm on Monday at an LDA Colony residence IN Krishna Nagar police station limits.

The victim, Unais Khan, had gone to attend a friend's birthday party at his house with three other minors.

During the celebration, Navneet Tripathi, the birthday boy aged 13, allegedly took out his father's licensed revolver from a car and accidentally fired it. The bullet hit Unais above his left eye, and he collapsed on the floor. He was rushed to Lokbandhu Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. But his family alleged that Unais was shot by an adult and it was no accidental firing.

DCP (Lucknow South) Nipun Agarwal said the three minors present at the party have been taken into custody and are being questioned. The police said they had seized the firearm and were examining CCTV footage. Tripathi was making videos with the firearm when it went off.

Unais, a class 7 student of Stella Maris School, was the captain of his school's football team. — *PTI*

Fake case: Court awards ex-soldier Rs 5L in damages

KOLLAM, 3 MARCH

A Kerala court has awarded damages of Rs 5 lakh to a retired army officer for "malicious prosecution" by the police.

Principal Munsiff Ragi S directed the state government and six police officers to pay the compensation to 54-year-old Willington, a retired Naik Subedar, for his "illegal detention and malicious prosecution."

Willington, who was implicated in a criminal case in 2013, was exonerated in 2017 after a re-investigation ordered by the Thiruvananthapuram Range IGP.

The munsiff court ruled in favour of the army officer by relying on an official communication from the Kerala Legislative Secretariat confirming his illegal detention.

The court said that the conduct of the police officers have been "actuated by malice," thereby disentitling them from the protection of sovereign immunity.

Willington, represented by advocates SR Prasanth and Vayanakam K Somasekharan Pillai, had alleged that on the night of 4 March 2013, police entered his residence by breaking open the door, assaulted him in front of his wife and children, killed two pet rabbits and contaminated the family's well with turpentine. He had also alleged that he was forcibly taken to the East Kallada Police Station, where he was detained for two days in his undergarments. — *PTI*

UIDAI updates biometrics of students in 1,03,000 schools

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has helped around 1,03,000 schools across India and millions of school students to complete their mandatory Aadhaar biometric update (MBU) in the comfort of their own school campuses.

"The Mandatory Biometric Update (MBU) drive has been going on for six months in mission mode across the country. The Aadhaar MBU for children in the 7-15 age group is free for a year from 1 October 2025. UIDAI Regional Offices and the education departments of states are working in collaboration with schools," said a statement released by the Union Ministry of Electronics & IT. So far, the massive exercise has helped around 1.2 crore (12 million) school children complete their MBU right in their schools.

Keeping biometric updated in children's Aadhaar helps them while carrying out authentication for receiving benefits under various government schemes, scholarships, wherever applicable, and for registering for competitive and university examinations like NEET, JEE, CUET etc. UIDAI has been encouraging parents and guardians to update their children's Aadhaar biometrics.

UIDAI rolled out the mission mode MBU drive for school children in September 2025, after a successful technological integration with the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) application.

The integration with UDISE+ of the Union Department of School Education & Literacy enabled visibility of MBUs status of children at schools.

- Keeping biometrics updated in children's Aadhaar helps them while carrying out authentication for receiving benefits under government schemes, scholarships and for registering for competitive as well as university exams

It helped to identify children who were due for an MBU and hold camps at schools to complete the MBU.

UIDAI Regional Offices and State Offices in the country have been working to coordinate the pro-children exercise with all the stakeholders including the Education Departments of States & UTs, district administration, schools and UIDAI's ecosystem partners. — *ANI*

Forum tells Malaysia Airlines to refund customer, fines MakeMyTrip

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

A consumer forum has directed Malaysia Airlines to refund Rs 65,802 along with interest to a city resident whose relatives' travel plans were disrupted due to cancellation of tickets during the COVID pandemic.

The Delhi District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission also imposed costs on MakeMyTrip for giving false refund assurances.

The commission was hearing a complaint filed by Karan Pradeep against MakeMyTrip and Malaysia Airlines over cancellation of tickets booked in October 2019 for travel to Kuala Lumpur and Manila from Delhi in March 2020.

Pradeep had purchased two tickets worth Rs 65,802 as a gift for his brother and his wife for travel between 13 March and 21 March 2020. However, due to COVID the plans got disrupted.

The complainant alleged that despite Malaysia Airlines introducing an "Ultimate Flexibility Ticket Change Policy" allowing date changes, MakeMyTrip refused to reschedule the tickets, claiming it was unaware of the airline's policy. He later agreed to cancel the booking after being falsely assured of refund within 60 to 90 days.

- The complainant alleged that despite Malaysia Airlines introducing an 'Ultimate Flexibility Ticket Change Policy' allowing date changes, MakeMyTrip refused to rescheduling, claiming that it was unaware of the airline's policy. He later agreed to cancel the booking after being falsely assured of a refund within 90 days

MakeMyTrip argued that the tickets were non-refundable and that the plea was barred by limitation.

The commission said that in view of the SC's extension of limitation during the pandemic, the complaint filed on 29 November 2023, was within time. — *PTI*

WILDLIFE PROTECTION

VP unveils drone to tranquilise elephants

T,PURAM, 3 MARCH

A drone designed to tranquilise violent elephants without close human contact, recently unveiled by Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, marks a significant milestone in the use of indigenous UAV technology for human-wildlife conflict mitigation, the manufacturing company said.

The unveiling of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) took place on Sunday in the presence of Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar and Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Natural Gas and Tourism Suresh Gopi, underscoring the national importance of integrating advanced aerial systems into wildlife protection efforts, the company said in a release.

"The customised drone is engineered to support safe and precise elephant darting operations by enabling aerial-assisted tranquilisation with enhanced accuracy.

"The system significantly reduces on-ground risk to forest personnel, minimises disturbance to wildlife, and improves operational efficiency during critical interventions involving distressed or conflict-prone elephants," it said.

The latest customised solution represents the culmination of years of field learning, technological upgrades, and mission-focused research and development, the company added. — *PTI*

MHA TO PROCESS WB CAA APPLICATIONS

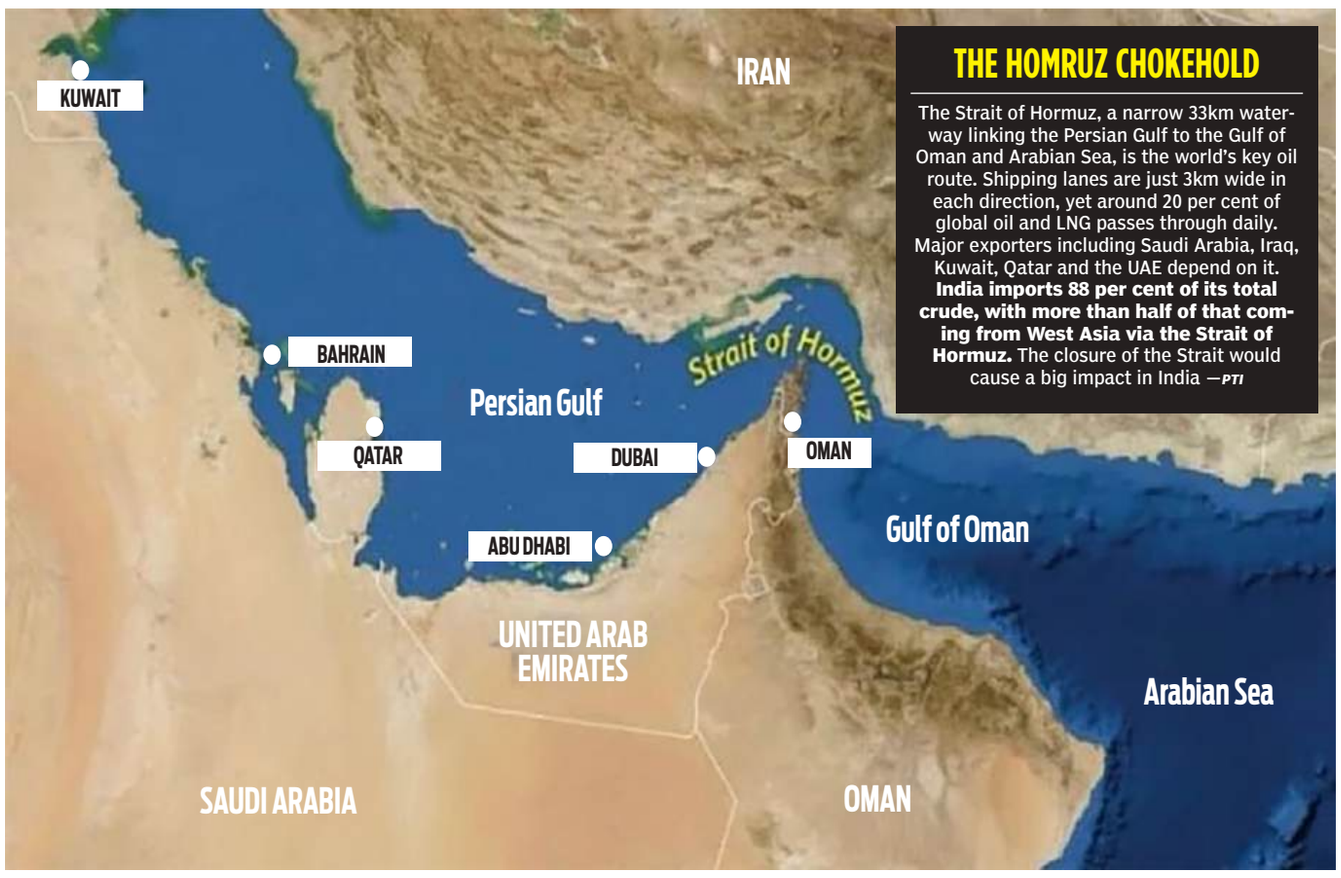
NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has set up two more empowered committees in West Bengal to decide on applications seeking Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019, according to a government order.

The state already has two such committees. However, in view of the large number of applications, a decision was taken to constitute two additional panels, officials said on Monday.

The empowered committee will be headed by an officer not below the rank of Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, to be nominated by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.

As per a notification issued on 11 March 2024, the committee under the CAA was headed by the Director (Census Operations) and had seven other members. The Centre implemented the CAA on 11 March 2024. — *PTI*



THE HOMRUZ CHOKEHOLD

The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow 33km waterway linking the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea, is the world's key oil route. Shipping lanes are just 3km wide in each direction, yet around 20 per cent of global oil and LNG passes through daily. Major exporters including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE depend on it. **India imports 88 per cent of its total crude, with more than half of that coming from West Asia via the Strait of Hormuz.** The closure of the Strait would cause a big impact in India —*PTI*

West Asia war: India's 100M barrels of oil to last 45 days

India holds about 100 million barrels of commercial crude oil stocks - in storage tanks, underground strategic reserves and on ships voyaging towards the country - which could cover roughly 40-45 days of its requirement if flows through the Strait of Hormuz are disrupted, according to Kpler.

India imports about 88 per cent of the crude oil it needs - the raw material for fuels such as petrol and diesel - with more than 50 per cent supplied by West Asian countries and transiting the narrow Strait of Hormuz, flows from which have been disrupted amid the Iran crisis.

If West Asia crude supply were to halt completely for a temporary period, the immediate impact would be logistical and price-driven, with supply risks intensifying if movement through the Strait of Hormuz is disrupted for longer, said Sumit Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining & Modeling at Kpler.

A closure of Strait of Hormuz would at first impact prompt cargo liftings. "However, refiners typically maintain commercial inventories, and cargoes already on water would continue to arrive, providing some short-term cushioning to the system," he said adding in the event of a prolonged disruption, medium-term pressures would build through higher import costs, freight exposure and the need to reroute supplies over longer distances.

"The country maintains strategic petroleum reserves alongside commercial inventories held by refiners and oil marketing companies. These buffers are intended to manage temporary supply shocks rather than sustained outages," he said. "Based on Kpler inventory data, commercial crude stocks are around 100 million barrels, including volumes in the strategic petroleum reserve (SPR) facilities at Mangalore, Padur and Visakhapatnam."

With imports via the Strait of Hormuz averaging roughly 2.5 million barrels per day - about half of India's just over 5 million bpd total crude imports - these combined reserves could theoretically cover around 40-45 days of imports in a crude disruption scenario, he said.

Additional refined product inventories would extend effective coverage further.

However, the immediate impact will be on prices. Brent, global benchmark, crossed USD 80 per barrel, roughly 10 per cent more since the Iran crisis. For India, higher prices means higher import bill.

India spent USD 137 billion on crude oil imports in fiscal year ended March 31, 2025. During April 2025 to January 2026 - first ten months of current fiscal - it spent USD 100.4 billion on import of 206.3 million tonnes of crude oil.

The United States and Israel launched military strikes on targets in Iran over the weekend.

Tehran retaliated with missiles and drones aimed at Israel and countries hosting US forces, including the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Media reports suggest the conflict has effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, a key conduit for global energy flows. Roughly one-third of the world's seaborne crude oil exports and about 20 per cent of liquefied natural gas shipments transit the narrow waterway.

India, the world's third largest oil importer, imports roughly half of its crude needs through the narrow Strait. Its mainstay liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplier in Qatar also uses the strait to ship the fuel to India.

In case of closure, India can tap suppliers in West Africa, Latin Amercia and the US to make up for the shortfall from the West Asia. India could also tap Russian oil to make up for the deficit.

India had agreed to wind down purchases of Russian oil as part of a trade deal with the US - a deal which now sits in limbo after the US Supreme Court struck down US President Donald Trump's country-based tariffs.

"Russian cargoes currently floating in the Arabian Sea and wider Asian region without firm buyers could also be absorbed relatively quickly if required," Ritolia said.

If the Strait of Hormuz - the narrow 33-kilometre passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea - were disrupted or shipping were forced onto longer routes, India's crude import bill would rise.

Even without a full blockade, higher freight, war-risk insurance and geopolitical premiums would lift landed costs.

"In a more severe scenario, policy intervention would likely become a key stabilising tool. The government could prioritise domestic energy security by asking refiners to moderate or temporarily curb refined product exports to ensure adequate domestic supply," he said.

Given that India is among the world's largest exporters of refined products, particularly diesel and jet, redirecting export volumes to the domestic market would provide an additional buffer.

India exported 23.7 million tonnes (474,000 barrels per day) of petroleum products or 10 per cent of the country's fuel consumption, in 2024-25. During April-January, exports stood at 53.3 million tones.

"If the Hormuz situation were to deteriorate meaningfully, safeguarding domestic fuel availability and price stability would likely take precedence over export optimisation, reinforcing internal supply resilience even at the cost of lower export revenues," he said.

The worst-case scenario would involve a prolonged and severe disruption to Hormuz flows combined with sustained geopolitical escalation. In that case, crude prices would spike sharply, freight markets would tighten, and refiners could eventually be forced to trim runs if replacement barrels are delayed. "However, such a scenario would have major global economic consequences, making it a low-probability but high-impact risk," he said adding the near-term risk is primarily price volatility and higher import costs rather than immediate physical shortage, for now.

India has diversification options and inventory buffers, but sustained disruption would materially increase the import bill and create macroeconomic pressures. —*PTI*

SALAR سالار

Netanyahu's Iran gamble risks straining US alliance

Throughout his political career, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has steered his country along two pillars of foreign policy: an ironclad partnership with the US and a relentless diplomatic and covert battle against the rulers of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Now, with Israel and the US in a war against Iran, those two strategic paths risk clashing. By enlisting the US in what he views as Israel's existential battle against Iran, Netanyahu is taking a gamble that could strain the relationship.

Persuading US President Donald Trump to join the war was a coup for Netanyahu, highlighting their strong ties. If successful, they could quickly realise their shared goal of toppling the Iranian government and spare the region a protracted conflict. But if the war drags on, the allies' ties could be tested again.

"A large part of the American public will view it as the Israeli tail wagging the American dog and that it is dragging the US to a war in West Asia that isn't theirs," said Ofer Shelah, a research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv-based think tank. The drop in public support that might unleash "will be very harmful for Israel in medium and long term," he added. But, he noted: "Netanyahu is not interested in the medium and long term."

US PUBLIC OPINION HAS BEEN EVOLVING

For Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving leader, successfully persuading Trump to strike Iran together marks the apex of decades of proximity to Washington. He speaks flawless English after spending part of his youth in the US and has always portrayed himself as Israel's bridge to America.

Although he boasts of tight relationships with multiple US presidents and members of Congress, Netanyahu has seen support for Israel among the American public drop over the past two years. Gallup polling shows American sympathies in West Asia shifting dramatically toward the Palestinians—a change driven largely by Democrats.

Some Republicans, and even Trump's backers, have grown more outspoken against the diplomatic and financial support the US has continued granting Israel during its war on multiple fronts, sparked by Hamas's 7 October 2023 attacks. Devastating images from the Gaza conflict deepened Israel's international isolation.

With this new war against Iran—the second in less than a year—Netanyahu is tackling an enemy he and many Israelis see as an existential threat, citing its support for anti-Israel militias across the region, its ballistic missile arsenal, and its nuclear programme. He has led the crusade against Iran on the world stage for much of his career.

Netanyahu said on Sunday that US involvement "allows us to do what I have been hoping to do for 40 years, to deliver a crushing blow to the terror regime." His office did not immediately respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

THE CONFLICT COULD SPIRAL

Days into the war, Israeli and US forces appear to be working hand in glove, striking targets from the initial attack that killed top Iranian leaders, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to assaults granting them free rein in Iranian skies.

But the conflict has already triggered aftershocks that could reverberate in the American heartland. At least six US troops have been killed. Travel disruptions have stranded hundreds of thousands across the region. Oil prices have surged, raising the prospect of costlier petrol for US drivers and higher prices for goods amid a rising cost of living.

Questions linger about the war's direction and aim. It is unclear whether air power alone will topple Iran's leadership, who or what should replace it, and what role Israel or the US might play. Every day brings new potential land mines.

"Many people will blame Israel if things go badly wrong," wrote Nadav Eyal, a commentator for the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth. "Israel cannot afford to lose the American public's support under any circumstances. That is more important than striking any individual military facility."

Still, Aaron David Miller, a former Middle East adviser to Democratic and Republican administrations over two decades, said Netanyahu has little to lose. With elections due this autumn, he can use the Iran war to divert attention from the failures of the 7 October 2023 attacks , Israel's worst in history. Instead, Netanyahu can cast himself as a brave wartime leader fulfilling a lifelong pledge to confront Iran, backed by the US president.

"If Trump feels as if it's going south, he'll find a way to de-escalate," Miller said, "and his good friend Benjamin Netanyahu will follow." —*PTI*

For Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, successfully persuading US President Donald Trump to strike Iran alongside Israel marks the apex of decades of close ties with Washington —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

China condemns but does little as another ally falls prey to US

Chairman Xi Jinping's political allies abroad are falling one by one to US military action. First came Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro; now Iran's Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been eliminated in Operation Epic Fury. China can only wring its hands and decry unilateral American aggression.

Ironically, Khamenei became Iran's supreme leader on 4 June 1989—the very day the People's Liberation Army massacred protesters in Tiananmen Square. China signed a comprehensive strategic partnership with Iran during Xi's 2016 Tehran visit, yet Beijing has done little as Israel and the US bombarded Iran from 28 February.

This partnership places Iran on par with the EU, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. It lags behind China's "all-weather strategic partnerships" with Belarus, Ethiopia, Hungary, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela, Russia occupies an even higher tier.

On 1 March, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russia's Sergey Lavrov spoke by phone, suddenly rediscovering their moral compass. "Flagrantly killing the leader of a sovereign state and inciting regime change are unacceptable; these acts violate international law and the basic norms of international relations," they declared. Of course, such principles do not apply to Vladimir Putin's Ukraine invasion, which China tacitly and materially supports. Wang pleaded for the international community to oppose a "regression to the law of the jungle," urging an immediate ceasefire and political settlement of the Iran issue.

Bonnie Glaser, Managing Director of the Indo-Pacific Program at the German Marshall Fund, observes: "This pattern of China expressing shock and concern, but taking no action and providing little if any help to Iran will not change. If there is a new regime, Beijing will seek to pragmatically develop good relations, regardless of who is in charge." No surprise, then, when the US struck Iranian nuclear sites during last year's Operation Rising Lion, Beijing offered only rhetoric.

China's interests in Iran are neither existential nor critical; Tehran depends far more on Beijing. Xi visited Iran once, in 2016, versus three trips each to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and six to Kazakhstan in 13 years. Pre-attack analysis by Brookings Institution's Ryan Hass and Allie Matthias predicted Beijing's unsentimental stance: focused on stability, oil access, and blocking a pro-US regime. A regime fall might worry China more about domestic aftershocks, evoking the Arab Spring's protest imagery.

A group of men inspect the ruins of a police station struck by Israeli military in Tehran on Tuesday —*PTI*

China values Iran for three reasons: energy security via oil and gas; diverting US attention from Beijing; and as a gateway to southwest Asia influence. Their 2021 25-year deal was mostly economic, $400 billion in promised Chinese investment for oil access, though funds have trickled. Over 80 per cent of Iran's oil exports go to China, sustaining its "ghost fleet" trade worth over $140 billion since 2021. Yet Iranian oil is just 13.4 per cent of China's seaborne imports, feeding small refineries reliant on discounted supplies from Iran, Venezuela, and Russia.

Security ties target terrorism, immigration, and crime, with joint exercises alongside Russia—the latest a BRICS Plus naval drill off South Africa in January. Huawei and ZTE built Iran's telecoms infrastructure; ZTE overlaid surveillance in 2010, aiding internet shutdowns during protests. China balances this with antipathetic Gulf states, offering Tehran no security guarantees.

Weapon claims abound — HQ-17AE, HQ-16, and HQ-9 air defences post-2025 Israel war; loitering munitions; missile components; stealth radars; BeiDou guidance; CM-302 anti-ship missiles; DF-17 hypersonics; and 1,000 tons of sodium perchlorate propellant precursor. But PLA expert Rick Joe cautions: "It's amazing how big the gap in perception of China-Iran geopolitical alignment/military sales is, versus reality... Gulf Cooperation Council states are the biggest customers for PRC military hardware, not Iran." Gulf arms sales dwarf Iran's.

Hass and Matthias call it "strategic opportunism": low-cost benefits from absent US-Iran ties. China can source oil elsewhere, prioritising its people, firms, and investments while courting any successor regime to avert US realignment. American strategist Miles Yu notes China's alliances are "hot air and deceit," abandoning partners like Ukraine for anti-US obsession. Beijing avoids binding defence pacts, shunning external commitments absent core stakes.

Unclear impacts include Trump's planned Beijing visit next month—China seeks trade relief, but will Iran derail it? US weapon stockpiles worry analysts. Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Malcolm Davis warns: Western democracies lag China's and Russia's defence build-ups for protracted war. "This new war is yet another step towards a wider global war... We're in a pre-war situation globally, and start preparing for the worst. And we don't have a decade to get ready."

Might US Iran focus and arsenal depletion prompt a Taiwan pre-emption? Glaser says no: "Beijing has its own timeline and strategy toward Taiwan. It won't be heavily influenced by Iran, Venezuela or Ukraine." Jamestown Foundation's Peter Mattis agrees: "The PLA is not ready by its own benchmarks. Few senior officers in place, problems over authority between Xi and the PLA."

US action might even bolster deterrence—Xi sees inaction as weakness. Regime change frees Washington from Middle East distractions like Houthi Red Sea attacks or Hormuz threats, which benefit China by tying down US resources.

Still, Hass and Matthias warn of intangibles: protest imagery could spark Chinese "neuralgias," prompting tighter surveillance to safeguard domestic stability—China's true existential priority over Iran. —*PTI*

An Israeli airstrikes in Dahiyeh, a southern suburb of Beirut, Lebanon, early on Tuesday —PTI

Israel invades parts of Lebanon

Hezbollah says it is ready for 'open war' as strikes continue

BEIRUT, 3 MARCH

- Israel has issued an evacuation notice for 80 villages and has moved troops into several posts in Lebanon. The Lebanese army is 'repositioning'

Israel sent additional troops into southern Lebanon on Tuesday and ordered residents of more than 80 villages to evacuate as the Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group said it is ready for an open war, escalating the already volatile situation in the region.

The latest exchanges started after Hezbollah fired rockets and drones early on Monday toward northern Israel. Israel retaliated with a wave of airstrikes that killed 52 people in Lebanon, including a Palestinian militant and a Hezbollah intelligence official in Beirut's southern suburbs.

More than 150 people were wounded and tens of thousands displaced.

Hezbollah said on Tuesday morning it fired two salvos of rockets toward northern Israel while Israeli airstrikes overnight damaged a building housing Hezbollah's TV and radio stations. Beirut's southern suburbs were subjected to a series of strikes in the early afternoon on Tuesday that came without warning, and the Israeli military later said it targeted Hezbollah officials.

A senior Hezbollah official said that after more than a year of abiding by a ceasefire as Israel's strikes continued on Lebanon, the group's patience has ended, leaving it with no option "but to return to resistance" and fight an open war with Israel.

"The Zionist enemy wanted an open war, which it has not stopped since the ceasefire agreement," Mohamoud Komati said "So let it be an open war."

Shortly before Aoun spoke, the Israeli military said it had sent additional troops into southern Lebanon and took new positions on several strategic points close to the border, while Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said the Lebanese army was evacuating some of its positions along the border.

A Lebanese military official said that Israeli troops moved into several areas in Lebanon, adding that the Lebanese army is "repositioning" in the area.

Hezbollah was supported by Iran as part of Tehran's 'Axis of Resistance'.

Israel launched a ground invasion of Lebanon in October 2024 during its last war with Hezbollah. It withdrew from most of southern Lebanon after a US-brokered ceasefire halted the fighting in November 2024, but has continued to occupy five points on the Lebanese side of the border since then. —*PTI*

US-Israel strikes hit Iran nuke facility: IAEA

WASHINGTON, 3 MARCH

The UN's nuclear watchdog the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) said that the US-Israel military strikes damaged Iran's Natanz Nuclear facility based on satellite images.

In a statement on X on Tuesday, the IAEA said that "no radiological consequence (is) expected", noting that the facility itself had not sustained serious impact. The IAEA said there was some damage to the entrance building of the underground facility.

It is unclear when the strikes took place. The Institute for the Study of War- a leading international policy research organisation said that it appeared as if the facility was hit on Monday, making it the first strike on a nuclear plant since the war started.

The Natanz plant was bombed by Israel and the US during the 12-day war last June. US President Donald Trump claimed that the strikes then had completely "obliterated" Iran's nuclear enrichment capabilities, only to later claim that Tehran was seeking to enrich uranium again. —*Agencies*

Damage to Iran's Natanz nuclear facilities —IAEA/VANTOR

SMALL COFFINS ARE HEAVIEST

Graves being dug for the 165 girls who were killed in Israeli-US strikes on a school Iran's southern city of Minab. Iran held mass funerals for the girls on Tuesday —X @ARAGHCHI/PRESS TV

> **The terrorist regime in Tehran is shooting at civilians, and we are shooting at the terrorist regime to protect civilians**
>
> Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister

Muslim appeaser: Trump after Starmer sits out on Iran strikes

US President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer —X

WASHINGTON, 3 MARCH

US President Donald Trump said that British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is pandering to Muslim voters by not backing Washington's attacks on Iran.

"He has not been helpful," Trump said on Monday. "I never thought I'd see that from the UK."

The transatlantic fallout comes after Starmer on Monday told the House of Commons that the UK "was not involved… in the strikes in Iran. That decision was deliberate. We believe that the best path for the region is through a negotiated settlement."

"It is my duty to judge what is in Britain's national interest," Starmer had said.

Starmer added that the US was being allowed to use British bases in the region for "defensive purposes".

However, Trump continued his tirade, saying that "UK is not a recognisable country" and attacked London's Mayor Sadiq Khan – who is from the Muslim community.

Trump also signalled a change in stance about whether US troops would be deployed on the ground: "Every President says, 'There will be no boots on the ground.' I don't say it. I say 'probably don't need them,' [or] 'if they were necessary."

Meanwhile, Trump is set to meet German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in the White House on Tuesday. —*Agencies*

WHOSE LINE IS IT ANYWAY?

'ISRAEL WAS GOING TO STRIKE, SO WE HAD TO'

WASHINGTON, 3 MARCH

Israel was going to attack Iran, and Tehran would have retaliated by striking US military bases in the region, US Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** said. This forced US to "pre-emptively" strike Iran, he told reporters on Monday after briefing the Congress on the war in the Middle East.

"We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action," Rubio said. "We knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn't pre-emptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties."

"The imminent threat was that we knew that if Iran was attacked – and we believed they would be attacked – that they would immediately come after us," Rubio said.

Rubio added that objective of the strikes was to destroy Iran's ballistic missiles programme, something Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said should have been a focus of the US-Iran nuclear talks.

Rubio also said that the "The hardest hits are yet to come". —*Agencies*

'US ENTERED A WAR OF CHOICE FOR ISRAEL'

TEHRAN, 3 MARCH

Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Seyed **Abbas Araghchi** said that the US entered a "war of choice" for Israel after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments.

"Rubio admitted what we all knew: US has entered a war of choice on behalf of Israel. There was never any so-called Iranian threat," Araghchi posted on X on Tuesday. "Shedding of both American and Iranian blood is thus on Israel Firsters. The American people deserve better and should take back their country."

Rubio had stated that Washington knew that Israel would have struck Iran, prompting Tehran to target US bases in the region, which would have resulted in high American casualties.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told Fox News on Tuesday that he had to bomb Iran otherwise the nuclear facilities would have gone "immune within months".

"If no action was taken now, no action could be taken in the future," he claimed.

Netanyahu also claimed that it wouldn't be a "forever war". —*Agencies*

US halts visa appointments in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 3 MARCH

The US Embassy in in Pakistan capital, Islamabad, on Tuesday (local time) announced that it is cancelling all visa appointments through Friday, 6 March. This comes after at least 22 people were killed and more than 120 injured in separate protests near the consulates over the US-Israel's assassination of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

At least 10 people were reportedly killed in Karachi, and two were killed in Islamabad after protests erupted across Pakistan following Khamenei's death on 28 February.

Several people were also killed in Gilgit-Baltistan. —*ANI*

Europe scrambles to defend bases in Middle East

PARIS, 3 FEB

Europe is scrambling to defend its military bases and evacuate thousands of stranded citizens as the US-Israeli war on Iran spills across the Middle East. Though not directly involved in the conflict, Britain, France and Germany have pledged support to the US.

Security fears have risen at home after a drone strike damaged a British base in Cyprus. Several countries have tightened protection at airports and train stations.

The immediate priority is bringing citizens home. Germany estimates about 30,000 of its nationals are stranded due to airspace closures, while the Czech Republic has deployed planes to evacuate people from Israel and neighbouring countries.

France has said it will expand its nuclear arseal —FRENCH MINISTRY OF ARMED FORCES

The EU is also weighing stronger naval measures to protect commercial shipping after threats in the Strait of Hormuz disrupted vital oil routes.

Meanwhile, French President Emmanuel Macron has said that France would be increasing the number of nuclear warheads in its arsenal. France currently has a little under 300 nuclear warheads. —*Agencies*

WITH 1 MILLION NEW VOTERS

PHOTO: X

'El Mencho' buried in a golden casket in Mexico

GUADALAJARA, 3 MARCH

Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes, known as 'El Mencho', leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, was buried in a shining gold casket in Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara. The funeral procession saw dozens of mourners, some holding black umbrellas and listening to regional Mexican music. Security was tight, with large flower wreaths arriving without names, some featuring a rooster image, as he was called the "Lord of the Roosters". He was killed by the Mexican army last week during an operation in Tapalpa, Jalisco, suffering multiple gunshot wounds. Authorities remain cautious due to cartel retaliation, which has caused over 70 deaths since his death. —*PTI*

Nepal to vote on 5 March in first polls since Gen Z revolt

KATHMANDU, 3 MAR

A year after a youth-led uprising forced out the government in Nepal, the country is set to go to the polls on Thursday to elected a new government, barely a few months after the Gen Z protests.

A total of 18,903,689 citizens have registered to vote on 5 March. They will elect a 275-strong lower house, of which 165 will be elected under first-past-the-post and the remaining 110 under proportional representation.

Nearly 19 million people are registered to vote in Nepal, according to the Election Commission. About 966,000 are men and 924,000 are women. Another 200 voters are registered under the "others" category, which includes people who do not identify as male or female and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

The number of registered voters has risen by nearly 1 million since the last parliamentary election in November 2022, as the youth-led uprising sparked greater interest in politics.

Balendra Shah —ANI

- With the Gen Z demanding a new and corrupt free government, all eyes turn to former Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, who will be contesting against ousted PM KP Sharma Oli

The youth-led uprising in September 2025 that brought down the previous government and triggered early elections has become a defining issue in the campaign.

Political parties have pledged to amplify the voices of younger voters, promising to tackle corruption and improve governance.

Thousands of voters have started to head home from Kathmandu to vote.

"That sort of candidate who can bring on the change in the country and someone who can work on that front where the citizens of this country don't need to go to other countries in search of work should be elected, I want that sort of candidate," said Raju Chaulagain, waiting at a bus stand. —*PTI*

Pak killed 67 Taliban fighters overnight: Minister

ISLAMABAD, 3 MARCH

Pakistan security forces have killed 67 Afghan Taliban personnel during overnight operations, repelling attacks at 16 locations along the southwestern border early Tuesday, officials stated. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar provided updates on Operation Ghazab lil Haq, launched on 26 February in response to Taliban raids.

Tarar said that 40 Taliban fighters were killed in overnight actions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with 12 locations subjected to fire raids, which were repulsed without loss of life. He added that follow-up operations are ongoing.

Taliban resorted to physical attacks across the border in Balochistan, engaging Pakistani troops at 25 sites. The attacks at all locations were defeated, with Taliban suffering 27 deaths and many injured. One Pakistani Frontier Corps soldier was killed, and five injured.

Overall, Pakistani forces have killed 435 Taliban fighters and injured 630. —*PTI*

Hilary and Bill Clinton —X

Clintons distance themselves from Epstein

WASHINGTON, 3 MARCH

Former US president Bill Clinton and his wife and former secretary of state Hillary Clinton tried to distance themselves from convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein in closed-door depositions with lawmakers, according to videos that were released on Monday by a House committee.

The recordings of the depositions, which spanned hours over two days last week, show how Bill told the committee that he had ended his relationship with Epstein years before the financier entered a 2008 guilty plea to soliciting prostitution from an underage girl. Hillary told the committee she never even met Epstein.

Hillary also scoffed at 'Pizzagate, a conspiracy theory that a paedophilia ring linked to her inner circle was operating in Washington.

Notably, there were allegations of rape against US President Donald Trump in the recently released 'Epstein files', that the Department of Justice reportedly tried to delete days before the Iran war broke out.

It may be recalled that Bill had bombed Sudan, Afghanistan and Iraq in 1998 amid his scandal with Monica Lewinsky. —*Agencies*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW US	47,844.14	(2.21%)
S&P 500 US	6,764.90	(2%)
Nasdaq US	22,292.12	(1.98%)
Nikkei JAPAN	56,279.05	(3.06%)
Hang Seng CHN	25,768.09	(1.12%)
DAX GERMANY	23,749.60	(3.61%)
FTSE 100 UK	10,467.88	(2.9%)
CAC 40 PARIS	8,120.01	(3.27%)
KOSPI S.KOREA	5,791.91	(7.24%)

PM urges industry to invest, research, & scale up mfg

Embrace new tech & opportunities from FTA

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

- Stressing that India has entered into free trade agreements with numerous countries, he said, it have opened up a wide range of opportunities for India.

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** on Tuesday urged industry leaders to step up investments, embrace emerging technologies and prioritise research to leverage the vast opportunities offered by free trade agreements with various nations.

Addressing the second webinar on Budget 2026-27, the prime minister said, the world is now looking for reliable and resilient manufacturing partners, and India has the opportunity to play this role decisively and enhance the country's participation in the global supply chain.

For this, he said, "all stakeholders must invest with confidence, adopt new technologies, and significantly increase investment in research — those days of being frugal in research are over. We must ensure quality in line with global standards. As I often say, when opportunities arise to move ahead, we must have only one mantra -- Quality, Quality, Quality."

Stressing that India has entered into free trade agreements with numerous countries, he said, these agreements have opened up a wide range of opportunities for the country.

"In such a situation, he said, "our responsibility is that we should never compromise on quality. If there is one area where we must apply maximum strength, intelligence, and focus, it is quality. Our products must meet global standards," he said. He urged participants at the webinar to prioritise key issues such as ways to increase manufacturing and production, make cost structures more competitive, accelerate investment flows, and ensure that development reaches every corner of the country. *—PTI*

War risk insurance premiums may rise

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Freight carriers will have to pay an additional premium to restore war cover for shipments passing through high-risk areas amid the escalating crisis in West Asia, experts said.

Vessels of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) are also involved in the movement of crude oil and LNG, especially through areas around the Red Sea, and would have to pay an additional premium for war cover to ensure risk cover.

"It is reasonable to expect that Indian oil companies will have cargo exposures and SCI will have hull exposure in this region. Oil prices are also likely to face upward pressure in the near term," Policybazaar Head (marine insurance) Balasundaram R said.

According to Prudent Insurance Brokers Head (marine specialities), Gaurav Agarwal, notice of cancellation of war cover has been issued on hull on 1 March, and a similar cancellation on cargo is expected soon.

After this cancellation, Agarwal said, the insurers may increase premiums on hull and cargo.

However, he said, unless the conflict becomes long and widespread, a major overall increase in insurance premiums across the board is unlikely.

Beyond marine and aviation lines, he said, the conflict is likely to create knock-on effects across other classes of insurance. *—PTI*

Rising oil prices may harm Asian stocks

A report by Invesco warns that a sustained increase in oil prices could negatively impact Asian stock markets, especially if geopolitical tensions persist. The report states that if oil prices continue to rise, equities across Asia would face downward pressure. Conversely, a quick resolution to ongoing conflicts could limit market damage. It highlights that prolonged oil price hikes could weaken growth and macro stability, particularly affecting countries like Thailand, India, Korea, & Philippines, due to high import dependence. Higher oil prices could also raise inflation risks in Korea & Taiwan, but central banks are unlikely to react aggressively. *—PTI*

West Asia conflict may deter India's investments: BMI

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

BMI, a Fitch Group company, reports that the ongoing conflict in the West Asia may discourage investment in India, counteracting benefits from trade agreements with the EU and the US.

The report states that a 10 per cent increase in crude oil prices could reduce India's GDP by 0.3 to 0.6 percentage points, with net oil importers in South Asia bearing the brunt of the crisis.

The conflict involves the US and Israel launching strikes on Iran, which responded with drones and missile attacks on Israel, US military sites, and energy facilities in Qatar and Saudi Arabia as well.

Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz threatens to cause global oil prices to soar, as roughly 20 per cent of seaborne crude passes through the Strait daily.

For India, high dependence on imported fuel and pass-through costs could squeeze households and firms, raising inflation and trade deficits. *—PTI*

—TATA

'Tata Sons prepared for West Asia instability'

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Amid escalating tensions in West Asia Tata Sons Chairman, Natarajan Chandrasekaran, said on Tuesday, "What we are seeing right now in Iran and the Middle East is that there will be some instability, but there should not be any problem with the supply chain. Our limestone procurement is being done from there. Tata Steel has enough inventory. Tata Steel will diversify into alternative sources. We are confident that there will be no problem because of that," he stated. Chandrasekaran said that over the past three days, the group has been fully engaged in ensuring the safety and well-being of its workforce and their families. *—ANI*

—WIKICOMMONS

Britannia receives Rs 6.37 cr GST demand notice

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

GST authorities have issued a demand notice of Rs 6.37 crore to Britannia Industries, and the company is exploring legal remedies. The bakery food company received the order from the Office of the Commissioner of CGST & Central Excise, Thane, on Monday, according to a regulatory filing from the company. The order has been passed under Section 74 of the GST Act for FY 2020-21 to FY 2023-24, alleging non-payment of tax due to "incorrect classification" of goods supplied. "The tax and penalty quantified in the order amount to Rs 2,12,40,000 and Rs 4,24,80,000 respectively, totalling to a demand of Rs 6,37,20,000 in addition to the applicable interest," Britannia said. *—PTI*

Dan Bailey named Jio Platforms President

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Jio Platforms Limited on Tuesday announced the appointment of Dan Bailey as its President to lead the company's international business initiatives. Bailey — who is based in London — will report to Akash Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm Limited, according to a release. Bailey brings more than 35 years of experience across consulting and investment banking, having held senior leadership roles at Schroders/Citi, Morgan Stanley, and HSBC. Most recently, he served as Chairman of Deutsche Bank's prominent TMT practice. "Over the course of his career, Dan has advised many of the world's largest corporates and financial sponsors on a broad range of transformative transactions, including some of the most consequential telecom deals in history," the release added. He will join the Executive Committee of Jio Platforms Limited and will contribute more broadly across the business as well. *—PTI*

Hiring rises 12% in Feb, driven by AI, IT: Report

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

India's white-collar job market recorded a 12 per cent year-on-year growth in February, amid increasing AI adoptions and a recovery in the IT sector, a report said on Tuesday.

White-collar job market posted its strongest February performance in recent years, with the Naukri JobSpeak Index reaching 3,233 points - up 12 per cent from 2,890 points in February 2025.

The month-on-month acceleration from January to February came in at 23 per cent, noticeably sharper than the 13-16 per cent range typically seen between the two months, the report based on Naukri JobSpeak Index added.

The IT sector posted over 6 per cent year-on-year growth in hiring in February 2026.

Freshers' hiring in the sector also grew by a healthy 8 per cent.

India-based multi-national IT companies were the primary driver, recording a 55 per cent hiring surge, the report said. Within the IT sector, it said that AI/ML (artificial intelligence/machine learning) hiring rose 40 per cent, reinforcing that February performance was concentrated in highest-skill, highest-value talent segments. The Naukri JobSpeak is a monthly index that tracks trends in India's job market and hiring activity, based on new job postings and recruiter searches on Naukri.com's resume database. *—PTI*

India, Canada sign MoU to strengthen agri-food ties

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

India and Canada strengthened bilateral cooperation in the agri-food sector with the signing of a five-year Memorandum of Understanding between the National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management-Kundli (NIFTEM-K) and the University of Saskatchewan.

The agreement was signed by NIFTEM-K Director Harinder Singh Oberoi and USask Vice President (Research) Baljit Singh in the presence of Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe and senior officials of India's Ministry of Food Processing Industries, according an official statement. The partnership follows the announcement by the Prime Ministers of both countries of a jointly supported Centre of Excellence in Pulse Protein, to be led by NIFTEM-K and USask. The MoU provides for joint research projects, online teaching and training programmes, faculty and student exchanges, integrated degree programmes in Food Processing Technology, and industry-oriented short courses. It also envisages collaborative funding proposals, seminars and workshops aimed at advancing innovation, sustainable food systems, food security and value-chain development.

Officials said the collaboration is expected to boost research-driven industrial growth and further strengthen India-Canada cooperation in agri-food sector while expanding global engagement in food technology & entrepreneurship. *—PTI*

Carney, Ambani discuss potential Reliance-Canada partnership

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney *—ANI*

has hailed his meeting with Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani on partnering with Canadian businesses, as Ottawa looks to expand economic engagement with India and boost bilateral trade. The meeting was held during Carney's visit to Mumbai on 28 February.

During his interaction with Ambani, Carney explored avenues through which Reliance Industries can collaborate with Canadian enterprises. The discussions focused on strengthening trade and investment ties, particularly in sectors such as energy, critical minerals and technology.

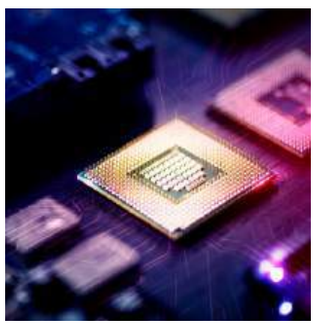
In a social media post on Tuesday, Carney said Canada is on a mission to double its trade with India and attract massive new investment for Canadian businesses.

"Canada is on a mission to double our trade with India and attract massive new investment for Canadian businesses. I met with Mukesh Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Industries, in Mumbai to discuss how they can partner with Canadian businesses. This has the potential to make both our economies stronger, more resilient -- and create high-paying career opportunities in energy, critical minerals, and technology," he stated.

At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Carney made an official visit to India from 27 February to 2 March. This marked his first official visit to the country. *—ANI*

Hike in memory chip prices a global concern, says Samsung

SAN FRANCISCO, 3 MARCH



South Korean consumer electronics maker Samsung said rising prices of memory chip is a "global issue" that is impacting the industry, but expressed confidence in its ability to manage supply through strategic partnerships.

The company, which is itself one of the major manufacturers of memory chips globally, is monitoring market dynamics very carefully, said Samsung Southwest Asia President and CEO JB Park.

It expects to remain relatively well-positioned on the supply side and will continue efforts to minimise the impact on its business by responding flexibly to market changes, he said here while responding to a PTI query in a media roundtable on the sidelines of a launch event of its flagship smartphone Galaxy S26 series.

"Rising memory semiconductor prices are a global issue and impacting the broader industry. We expect to be relatively well-positioned on the supply side through strategic partnerships and will continue efforts to minimise the impact on our business by responding flexibly to market changes," said Park.

However, he also acknowledged "the shortage of memory chips will go on till 2027".

There is a lot of surge in the AI industry (for data centre), which has "stuck the majority of supply in our fab", Park added.

Several companies, including Samsung, are facing a severe memory chip shortage, which is driven primarily by explosive AI data centre demand outstripping supply for all memory types (DRAM, HBM, and NAND).

The shortage is already impacting prices of consumer products such as budget mobile handsets, laptops, LED televisions and other appliances.

These categories are witnessing price hikes and stock shortages as manufacturers struggle to secure adequate supplies of memory components.

India is a strategic market of the South Korean giant, which contributes around 10 per cent of its global revenues. *—ANI*

NO ISSUE WITH FUTURES, CONCERNS OVER SHORT-DATED OPTIONS: SEBI

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

- The regulator also considers proposals for minimum eligibility criteria for derivatives trading and is reviewing a Pre-IPO trading framework for unlisted shares

SEBI Chairman **Tuhin Kanta Pandey** assured that the regulator has no issues with the futures segment but remains alert to speculative activity in short-dated options.

Recent regulatory measures target excesses in short-tenor options, introduced in October 2024 and May 2025, with further assessments ongoing. Pandey explained that the concern is with short-dated options, not futures, which are vital for price discovery and liquidity.

He said, "We are looking at what impact it has based on data. If intervention is needed, we will explore different pathways." Short-dated options, including zero-day-to-expiry contracts, are highly volatile and risky, offering high leverage for traders betting on short-term movements. Sebi's approach is to address specific problem areas identified through data, without broad-based actions.

The regulator also considers proposals for minimum eligibility criteria for derivatives trading and is reviewing a Pre-IPO trading framework for unlisted shares, subject to public consultation. Focus remains on maintaining the health of India's capital markets. *—PTI*

PROTOTYPE LAUNCH THIS YEAR

Here's how Agnikul's AI data centre in space would work

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Chennai-based Agnikul Cosmos would launch the prototype of an artificial intelligence (AI) data centre in orbit by the end of this year, aiming to make it commercially viable by 2027, the space company's co-founder Srinath Ravichandran has said.

AI data centres are used to train AI models and are huge in size.

Agnikul's prototype of it will be hosted on the extendable upper stage of the rockets.

While Agnikul Cosmos will launch the AI data centre, it will be developed by Bengaluru-based NeevCloud, an AI SuperCloud platform, the company announced on 12 February.

With the ever-expanding use of AI, there has been a massive increase in the amount of data that needs to be stored and processed.

Global demand for data centre capacity could rise at an annual rate of between 19 per cent and 22 per cent from 2023 to 2030 to reach an annual demand of 171 GW to 219 GW, according to global management consultants McKinsey.

Since data centres are large and need an enormous amount of power and water for cooling, companies have been struggling to find places to build them, a reason why SpaceX, Google, Axiom, and others are trying to find ways to put data centres in space.

The data centre launched by Agnikul Cosmos will not be a standalone satellite.

Instead, there will be a constellation of satellites (or upper stages of different rockets) in low Earth orbit, each hosting different data centre modules.

The constellation will be configured to not do heavy work during the eclipse phase — the period when it will pass through the shadow cast by the Earth, blocking direct sunlight.

"They will run in a low-power mode for tasks like transmitting data, and then switch to high-power mode during the sun-facing phase. This framework already exists for imaging satellites," Ravichandran said. The satellites will use radiative cooling to bring down temperatures, something that Agnikul Cosmos claims to have worked on extensively.

Radiative cooling is the process by which a body loses heat by thermal radiation.

Although the prototype launch at the end of 2026 will not lead to the commercialisation of the data centre, Ravichandran hopes that the mission will showcase his company's ability to build an AI data centre in space.

"From 2027, we will be in commercialisation mode, which will open up a new class of customers and significantly increase our market," Ravichandran said. *PTI*

—ANI

India-Eng T20 WC: Gaffaney, Palekar to be umpires

DUBAI, 3 MARCH

The International Cricket Council (ICC) announced on Tuesday the match referees for the T20 semifinal between India and England to be played in Mumbai on Thursday. New Zealand's Chris Gaffaney and Allahudien Paleker of South Africa will be the on-field umpires, with Zimbabwean Andy Pycroft as match referee, Adrian Holdstock as third umpire, and Paul Reiffel as fourth umpire. Gaffaney also oversaw the proceedings when India and England met at the same stage in the 2024 edition of the tournament. Paleker, on the other hand, stood in two of England's matches in the ongoing tournament as well as in India's victory over the Netherlands. —*PTI*

US midfielder McKennie extends deal with Juventus

TURIN, 3 MARCH

United States midfielder Weston McKennie had his contract with Juventus extended on Monday so that he can complete a decade at the Turin club. The new deal expires in 2030, 10 years after McKennie signed with Juventus. The extension comes three months before a home World Cup for McKennie, with a reported salary increase from 2.5 million euros to 4 million euros per season, according to the Gazzetta dello Sport. The 27-year-old McKennie has 26 goals and provided 26 assists in 220 appearances for Juventus. He has become a favorite of new Juventus coach Luciano Spalletti, who appreciates McKennie's versatility and even fielded him as a striker recently. —*PTI*

Real Madrid loses second straight match

MADRID, 3 MARCH

Real Madrid lost a second straight La Liga match when a stunning volley from Martín Satriano gave Getafe a shock 1-0 win at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Monday. The result prevented the capital club from cutting the four-point gap to leader Barcelona. Soria turned over a shot from Arda Güler midway through the first half, not long after frustrating Vinicius Junior when he was through on goal.Getafe had lost all eight of its previous league encounters with Real Madrid and early saves from goalkeeper David Soria kept it from falling behind. Getafe held on to secure its first win at the Santiago Bernabeu since 2008, and a vital three points in its bid to stay in La Liga. They jumped three league places into 11th and were eight points above the relegation zone. —*PTI*

—WIKIPEDIA

Lawson says 2026 F1 cars are not 'super fun' to drive

WELLINGTON, 3 MARCH

New Zealand driver Liam Lawson is looking forward to the start of the new Formula 1 season in Melbourne, although he says the new-era cars are not "super fun" to drive. Lawson is hoping to build on a troubled 2025 season in which he lasted only two races with Red Bull before being demoted to the sister Racing Bulls team. Racing Bulls will be using the new Red Bull-Ford power units in 2026 and Lawson said his team had been pleased with their reliability. The Australian Grand Prix on the Albert Park circuit in Melbourne will open the 2026 season on Sunday. —*PTI*

'India-England semis will be humdinger'

Ex-India captain Gavaskar says Bumrah and Varma will give India a slight edge

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Legendary former India captain **Sunil Gavaskar** expects Thursday's T20 World Cup semifinal between India and England at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai to be a "humdinger," with the hosts holding a slight edge due to a flexible batting line-up and the presence of pace ace Jasprit Bumrah.

Reigning champions India face England in a repeat of the semifinals from the 2022 and 2024 editions.

In 2022, England defeated India by 10 wickets at Adelaide, while India exacted revenge two years later in Providence, West Indies.

"Both sides are very well-matched. They have batting and bowling, middle-order strength, and finishers. Both teams also have variety in their bowling," Gavaskar said ahead of the DP World Celebrity Golf Event, held to create awareness for the CHAMPS Foundation.

He noted that several English players are familiar with Indian conditions through the IPL and understand the pressures of knockout matches, making the clash unpredictable.

New Zealand's captain Mitchell Santner with teammates James Neesham and Glenn Phillips during a training session ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, at Eden Gardens, in Kolkata, on Tuesday —*PTI*

Gavaskar highlighted that the contest between Bumrah and England batters, particularly the in-form Harry Brook, will be crucial. He recommended that Bumrah bowl early in the powerplay to maximise the chances of striking key batters such as Jos Buttler, Phil Salt, and Brook.

> Gavaskar highlighted that the contest between Bumrah and England batters, particularly the in-form Harry Brook, will be crucial. He recommended that Bumrah bowl early in the powerplay to maximise the chances of striking key batters

"As a new-ball bowler, if Bumrah can get early wickets, he will have broken the back of the England batting. Coming in the fifth over gives batters 8-10 deliveries to settle, so better to bowl first," he explained.

> **The crowd, the opposition, we play a lot with the Indian guys, so there's going to be no secrets in terms of what each team will probably throw at each other**
>
>
>
> -Sam Curran, England player

Gavaskar praised Bumrah's unpredictability across formats, describing him as an "enigma" for opposing batters.

His ability to disguise deliveries, making them difficult to read, makes him devastating in all three formats.

Another advantage India enjoy is a highly flexible batting unit, exemplified by Tilak Varma, who has batted at positions three, five, and six during the tournament. Gavaskar said Tilak's calm approach has helped relieve pressure from teammates such as Sanju Samson.

"He reads the situation well and adapts accordingly. That flexibility is a major asset for India," he added.

Gavaskar also warned against underestimating Buttler despite his lean patch in the tournament. "He can be as destructive as Abhishek Sharma. Getting his wicket early will be ideal, but we must stay alert as he can find form quickly," he said.

With both teams boasting a blend of experience, talent, and match awareness, Gavaskar predicts a closely fought encounter.

"It's going to be exciting. The margin will be fine, and small moments like early wickets or smart finishing could decide the semifinal," he concluded. The semifinal promises to be a thrilling contest, with India slightly favoured at home but England bringing the experience and tactical nous to make it fiercely competitive. —*PTI*

MARKRAM & SANTNER KEY TO NZ VS PROTEAS SEMIS

KOLKATA, 3 MARCH

South African captain **Aiden Markram** will face probing questions from New Zealand's Mitchell Santner in the first T20 World Cup semi-final at Eden Gardens on Wednesday. The rivalry between the two sides peaked during the 2015 50-over World Cup semi-final, with New Zealand winning a nail-biting encounter. South Africa, under Shukri Conrad, has grown into a formidable side, winning last year's World Test Championship. Markram, with a strike rate over 175 and 268 runs, has been impactful during powerplays, while Santner's economy rate of 6.35 has kept batters in check. South Africa's powerful line-up includes Markram, Quinton De Kock, Dewald Brevis, and others, while Santner's bowlers have performed well. The Eden Gardens pitch favours batting, with Lockie Ferguson's early. —*PTI*

Selection member quits after Pak's poor show

LAHORE, 3 MARCH

Senior selection committee member **Aleem Dar** has resigned from his post following Pakistan's disappointing T20 World Cup campaign, sources said on Tuesday.

The former ICC elite panel umpire has submitted his resignation to Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), though it has yet to be accepted.

According to a source close to the PCB, Dar was unhappy with the authority exercised by head coach Mike Hesson in selection matters. He had reportedly opposed the inclusion of Babar Azam and Shadab Khan in World Cup squad, arguing they had not earned selection on recent form. However, Hesson insisted on their inclusion. Dar was also said to be surprised that captain Salman Agha and fellow selectors did not challenge the coach's stance. The source added that Dar pushed for Mohammad Rizwan's inclusion ahead of Usman Khan, citing his experience, but got no backing.

Pakistan failed to reach the semi-finals, losing to India and England, while their Super Eight match against New Zealand was washed out.—*PTI*

War fear leaves WI team stranded in India

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The West Indies cricket team remains stranded in India following their exit from the ICC T20 World Cup, as international airspace restrictions have been imposed amid US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) stated it is working closely with the ICC and relevant government authorities to ensure the safe travel of players. Flight operations in the Gulf region are currently suspended, with reports of damage at Dubai International Airport, one of the world's busiest airports.

Cricket West Indies (CWI) stated it is working closely with the ICC and relevant government authorities to ensure the safe travel of players—*PTI*

CWI explained that the departure of the West Indies team has been delayed due to these restrictions, which are a result of security threats from military actions in the Gulf. The restrictions have impacted several international flight routes, forcing airlines to adjust schedules for safety reasons. The team was eliminated after losing a must-win Super Eight match to India in Kolkata. CWI expressed appreciation for the understanding of fans, families, and stakeholders during this difficult time.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe is also stranded in India due to the same issues. Zimbabwe Cricket confirmed they are currently in Delhi, with new travel plans being organised. The squad was initially scheduled to return via Dubai, but the evolving West Asia situation has disrupted key transit routes.

Zimbabwe Cricket said: "The squad remains in constant communication with the ICC and team management on the ground to ensure the squad's safe and timely return."

Zimbabwe lost their final Super Eights match to South Africa by five wickets on Sunday. —*PTI*

PV Sindhu returns safely to India from Dubai

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Indian badminton star PV Sindhu has safely arrived back in Bengaluru after being stranded in Dubai amid rising West Asia tensions.

The two-time Olympic medallist shared her relief and gratitude on X, describing the last few days as intense and uncertain. She thanked the ground teams, Dubai authorities, airport staff, immigration, and everyone who supported. Sindhu's father, PV Ramana, told that the Indian Embassy in Dubai was taking care of her, and she was staying in a hotel.

She had earlier expressed fears on X, recounting hearing interceptions & witnessing alarming visuals, describing it as frightening. —*PTI*

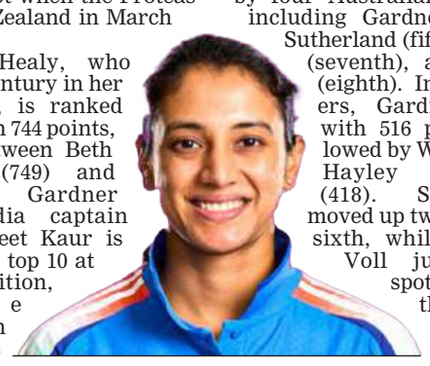
Mandhana tops Women's ODI Batting Rankings

DUBAI, 3 MARCH

India opener **Smriti Mandhana** has risen to the top of the ICC Women's ODI Batting Rankings following her impressive performances in the recent three-match series against Australia.

Mandhana, who scored 58 and 31, now has 790 points, surpassing South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt (782), who will have a chance to reclaim the top spot when the Proteas face New Zealand in March and April.

Alyssa Healy, who scored a century in her final ODI, is ranked fourth with 744 points, sitting between Beth Mooney (749) and Ashleigh Gardner (724). India captain Harmanpreet Kaur is also in the top 10 at ninth position, while Jemimah Rodrigues is 12th. Despite losing all three matches, Harmanpreet scored 53, 54, and 25, moving four spots back into the top 10. Deepti Sharma is India's sole representative in the top 10 among bowlers, ranked tenth. Alana King has overtaken Sophie Ecclestone to top the Women's ODI bowling rankings with a career-high rating of 775, thanks to her seven-wicket haul in the series.



She is joined in the top eight by four Australian bowlers, including Gardner (third), Sutherland (fifth), Schutt (seventh), and Garth (eighth). In all-rounders, Gardner leads with 516 points, followed by West Indies' Hayley Matthews (418). Sutherland moved up two places to sixth, while Georgia Voll jumped 23 spots to 34th in the batting rankings. —*PTI*

Indian women's cricket team picked for Laureus Award

MADRID, 3 MARCH

The Indian women's cricket team has been nominated for the 2026 Laureus World Team of the Year Award, the first time a women's cricket team has received this honour. The nomination follows their historic World Cup victory, including the highest successful run chase in women's ODI history against Australia. Laureus praised their semi-final performance and maiden title win. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia called it a watershed moment, highlighting the team's inspiring impact. President Mithun Manhas stated their recognition underscores their hard work. The winners will be announced at Laureus Awards in Madrid on 20 April. —*PTI*

AIFF orders stadium closure for Mohun Bagan-Odisha game

KOLKATA, 3 MARCH

The All India Football Federation's disciplinary committee has fined Mohun Bagan Super Giants and ordered that the team's next Indian Super League (ISL) game against Odisha FC be played in an empty stadium for alleged spectator misconduct during its previous match against Chennayin FC.

The club said it has accepted the unspecified financial penalty, while its appeal against the ban on spectators for the 6 March game at the Salt Lake Stadium here has been rejected. "The AIFF Disciplinary Committee has charged Mohun Bagan Super Giant over alleged spectator misconduct during the match against Chennaiyin FC. While the Club has responsibly accepted the financial penalty imposed, AIFF has gone to the extreme of ordering a 'full stadium closure' for our home game against Odisha FC on 6 March 2026," Mohun Bagan posted.

"We are deeply disappointed with the AIFF Disciplinary Committee's decision to impose a full stadium closure for our home fixture on 6 March 2026, it said. —*PTI*

'Want to travel through India and climb Everest'

MELBOURNE, 3 MARCH

Ferrari Formula 1 driver **Lewis Hamilton** has revealed his dream of exploring India and venturing into the Himalayas, with ambitions to eventually climb Mount Everest.

Reacting to a question in a recent video shared by F1, Hamilton said, "Where I really want to go is... I wanna travel through India and then make my way up through the Himalayas. That's like my future dream for me, and then I'm gonna climb Mount Everest."

The seven-time Formula One World Drivers' Championship winner, who holds records for most wins, pole positions, and podium finishes, is gearing up for the 2026 season with Scuderia Ferrari. The season is set to kick off with the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on 8 March, following pre-season testing which was held in Bahrain from 11 to 20 February. —*ANI*

AFC ASIAN CUP

Women's team rues lack of proper playing kits

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

In an embarrassing development that exposed mismanagement within the All India Football Federation (AIFF), national team players complained about a lack of appropriate clothing during preparation and the arrival of ill-fitting kits just a day before their opening AFC Women's Asian Cup match in Australia.

In an unprecedented letter addressed to AIFF Deputy General Secretary M Satyanarayanan ahead of India's opening match against Vietman in Perth on Wednesday, all the 26 players of the squad expressed their frustration at the lack of proper clothing and playing kits, saying it has affected their morale and disrupted their focus.

India women's senior football team —*ANI*

"Representing India on the international stage requires professional standards, including properly fitted and appropriate match and training apparel," the letter said, clearly suggesting lack of professionalism in the AIFF management. "Over the past days, players and staff have already faced challenges due to the lack of appropriate clothing during preparation. The arrival of incorrect match kits at this crucial stage has further affected morale and disrupted our focus in the final days leading up to the match."

The letter was signed by eight players, including captain Sweety Devi Ngangbam and highest capped member Grace Dangmei, but said all the members of the squad collectively agreed to its contents. The letter also listed all the 26 players who have agreed to the contents. —*PTI*